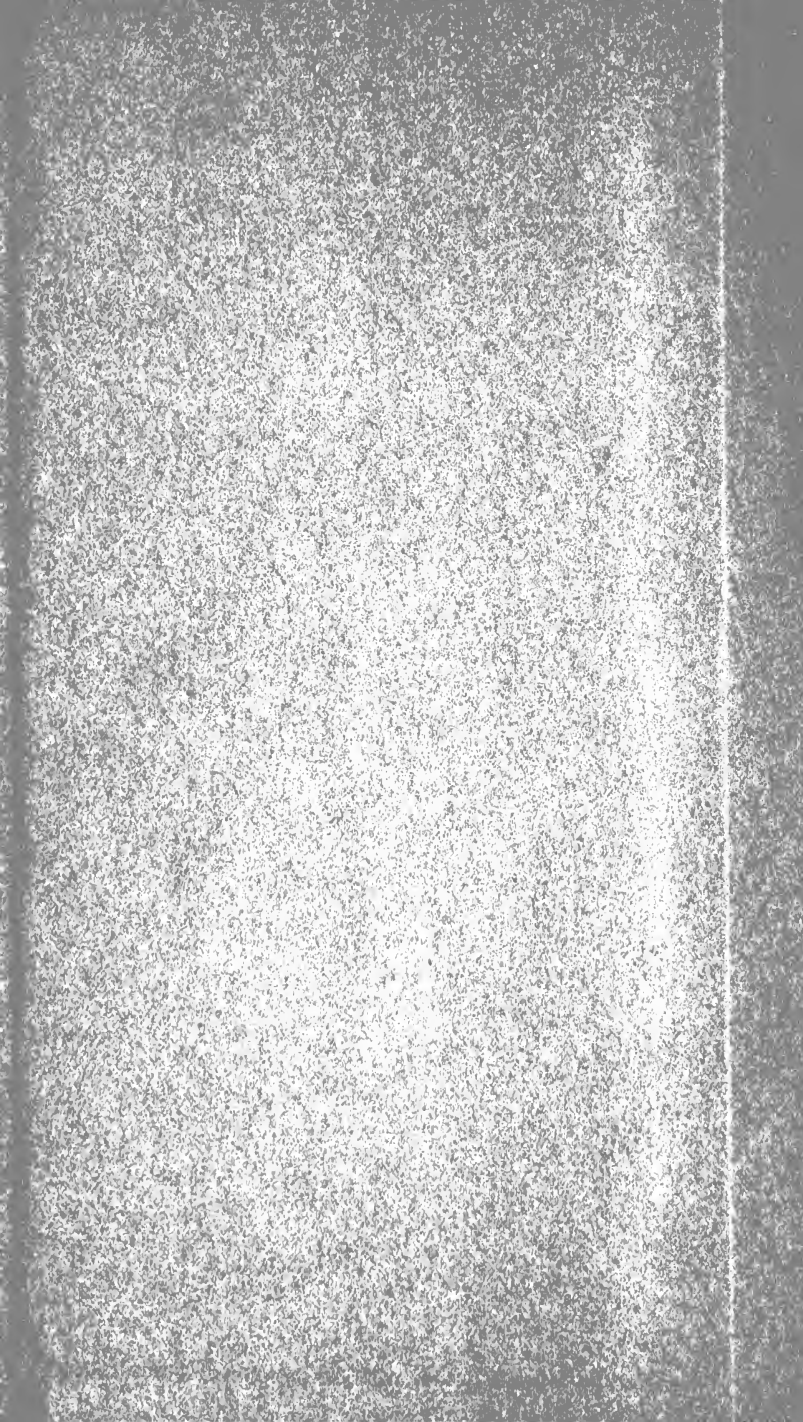


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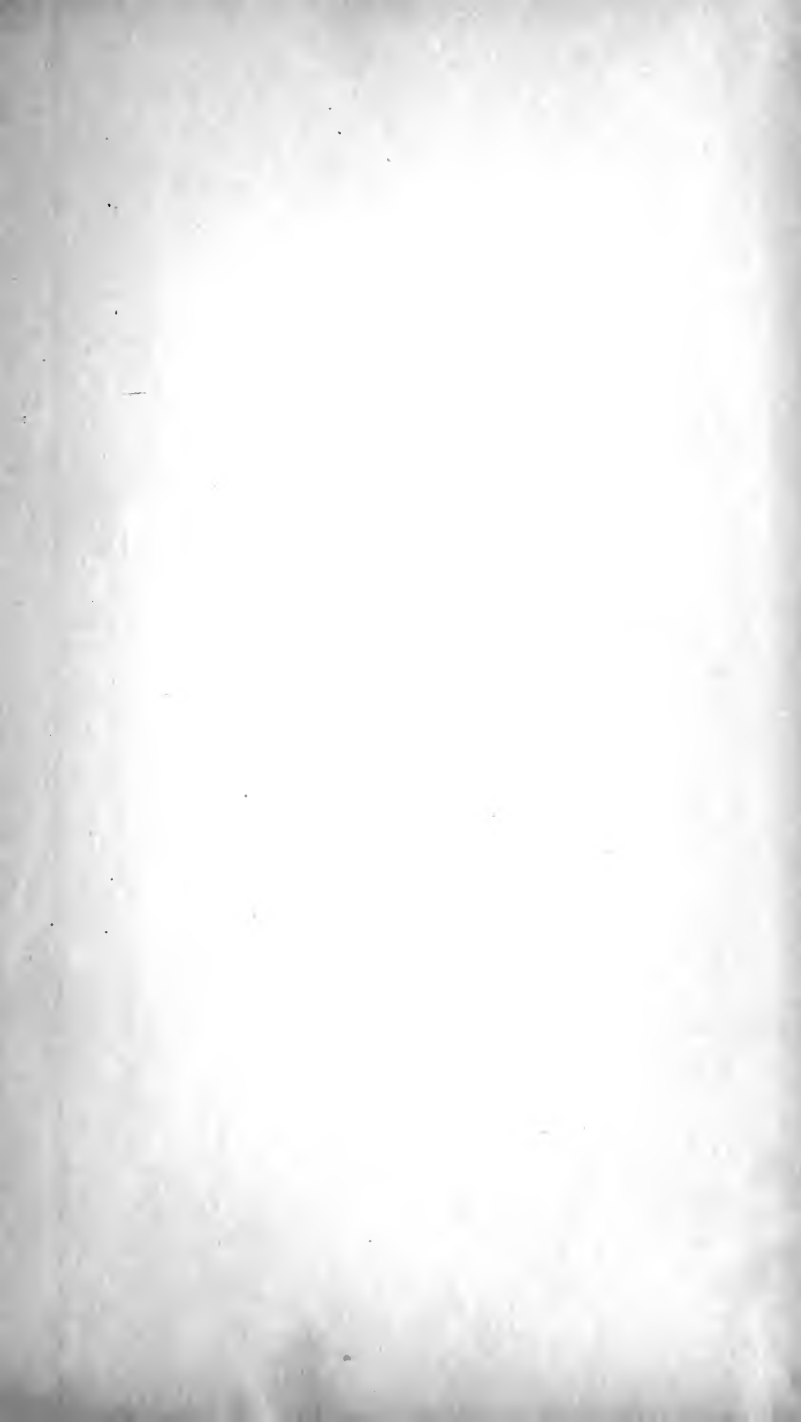


IW

Parrish









# THE GREAT PLAINS

By MR. PARRISH

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## THE GREAT PLAINS

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# THE GREAT PLAINS

THE ROMANCE OF WESTERN AMERICAN  
EXPLORATION, WARFARE, AND  
SETTLEMENT, 1527-1870

BY

RANDALL PARRISH

AUTHOR OF "WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING," "MY LADY OF THE  
NORTH," "HISTORIC ILLINOIS," ETC., ETC.



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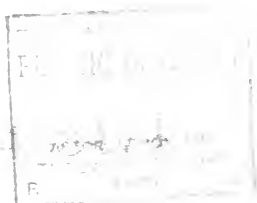
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Checked

**This volume is dedicated**

**TO THOSE**

**WHO, BY REASON OF THEIR COURAGE, PRIVATIONS, AND SACRIFICES  
RENDERED POSSIBLE THE WRITING OF THIS STORY  
OF AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT,  
THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO WON THE  
GREAT PLAINS FROM SAVAGERY TO CIVILIZATION**

I hear the tread of Pioneers,  
Of Nations yet to be;  
The first low wash of waves, where soon  
Shall roll a human sea.

—*Whittier.*

## PREFACE

**H**ERETOFORE the romantic history of the Plains has never been condensed within the limits of a single volume. The facts herein narrated have been scattered throughout a multitude of books, some of which are named in the Note of Acknowledgment. In addition to these, it has been found necessary to consult files of newspapers, old magazines, and not a few unpublished manuscripts in the possession of various State Historical Societies. The labor of collating and arranging material has been no small part of the task, and was supplemented by extensive travel throughout the regions described.

In treating of the Great Plains I have purposely omitted Texas. The story of the Lone Star State is so distinctly separated from that of the more central and northern Plains country, both as regards settlement and warfare, as to require greater space than could be afforded within a single volume.

It would be presumptuous to suppose that a book covering so wide a field could be entirely devoid of errors; but I am confident that the work may be relied on for historical accuracy.

There are two perfectly legitimate ways of writing history. One is to make a simple statement

## PREFACE

of facts; the other, to clothe the statement in language fitted to appeal to the reader's imagination. It is perhaps unnecessary to say which method I prefer, the book itself being sufficiently illustrative. It is written largely for those to whom history has been heretofore dry and unpalatable, and my sole desire is that it may awaken within their hearts a fresh interest in those who were the pioneers in the redemption of the Great Plains.

R. P.

*Chicago, May 1, 1907.*

## NOTE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

**T**HE following authorities have been used in the preparation of this volume: Parkman's "A Half Century of Conflict"; Hitchcock's "The Louisiana Purchase"; Bancroft's "United States History"; Herbert Bancroft's "Colorado and Wyoming"; Chittenden's "History of the American Fur Trade"; Marcy's "Army Life on the Border," and "Overland Expeditions"; Winship's Edition, "The Journey of Coronado"; Inman's "Old Santa Fe Trail", and "Old Salt Lake Trail"; Grinnell's "Story of the Indian"; Hough's "Story of the Cowboy"; Laut's "Story of the Trapper"; Forsyth's "Story of the Soldier"; Gregg's "Commerce of the Prairies"; Dodge's "Our Wild Indians"; Belden's "The White Chief"; Brady's "Indian Fights and Fighters"; Spring's "Kansas"; Holloway's "History of Kansas"; Bowles's "Across the Continent"; Richardson's "Beyond the Mississippi"; Sanborn's "Life and Letters of John Brown"; Transactions Kansas Historical Society; Lummis's "Spanish Pioneers," and "Pioneer Transportation in America"; Reports of Lewis and Clark, Pike, and Long; American State Papers; Nebraska Historical Transactions; Custer's "Boots and Saddles"; and others referred to in the text.

R. P.





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# THE GREAT PLAINS



# THE GREAT PLAINS

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## PART I.—EXPLORATION

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### CHAPTER I

#### NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS; FLORA AND FAUNA

##### Situation and Extent of the Great Plains

**F**ROM a purely technical viewpoint the Plains properly form only a comparatively small portion of that extensive area of prairie country the story of which is to be told in these pages. Yet, by common consent as well as historical precedent, the term has become quite generally applied as descriptive of all that vast region of grass land and arid desert which extended like an uncharted sea of green and brown desolation between the valley of the Missouri upon the north and east, and the foothills of the Rockies.

This truly immense territory, extending from about the centre of the Dakotas southward to the Rio Grande, possessed an average width of five hundred miles. It embraced Texas, Indian Territory, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the larger



## THE GREAT PLAINS

part of the two Dakotas, together with a considerable portion of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. While largely similar in topography, it was nevertheless varied by numerous river courses, by the outcropping of low mountains, by shifting sandhills, by occasional strips of woodland, and by the gradual divergence from rolling, luxuriant prairie to level, sterile plain. Over all, however, there remained a peculiar sameness from which there was no escape. Mile after mile revealed the same vast picture of solitude, haunting in its loneliness, baffling in its similarity of outline.

### Description of the Surface

Along the rivers—usually shallow streams, the water often red with matter in suspension, the bottoms treacherous with quicksand—there were commonly miles of rough, broken land, frequently terminating in high bluffs, and these occasionally traversed by ravines of considerable depth and abruptness. Trees, growing sparsely, and deformed by wind, clung precariously to these steep hillsides, while cottonwoods and willows fringed the banks of smaller streams, usually visible for long distances. There were considerable areas of sand, constantly shifting before the violence of storms, the mounds assuming grotesque shapes; such trackless wastes were usually destitute of water and vegetation. Patches of alkali, white and poisonous, stared forth from the surrounding green, rendering the streams

## NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS

brackish, and impossible for man or beast. To north and south the Black Hills, the Wichita Buttes, and the Washita Range rose from out the very heart of the surrounding desolation, tree-covered and rocky. Here and there "bad lands," ugly and drear, gave unpleasant variety. In widely remote regions odd growths of black-jack extended for leagues, sometimes nearly impenetrable, so closely interlaced were the trees; while toward the more western mountain boundary vast canyons formed almost impassable barriers, and isolated buttes arose like ghosts from out the enveloping plain, assuming fantastic shapes under the relentless chisel of the elements.

A remarkable region was found in the sand hills of what is now Nebraska. These, rounded and possessing a thin covering of turf, often of considerable height, are so exactly like each other that it is almost impossible to distinguish between them. They afford absolutely no guidance, but rather produce the confusing and baffling effect of a maze; and once off the trail, the unfortunate traveller becomes completely lost. Farther north, between the Black Hills and the Missouri, lie the *Mauvaises Terres* of the French. Here Nature seems to have exerted herself in a search after the repulsive. The whole country is a series of gullies, with hills rising above them carved by the elements into the most fantastic forms, unlike anything to be found elsewhere. The soil appears oily, becoming so slippery

## THE GREAT PLAINS

when wet as to make the climbing of the steep slopes almost impossible. On these barren, ash-colored hills scarcely the slightest vegetation thrives. Little animal life, other than the snake and the lizard, is to be found, and all about extends a scene of complete desolation.

Yet, considered as a whole, and as the earlier travellers certainly perceived it, this area was composed of irregular, rolling prairie, bearing the appearance of innumerable petrified waves ever extending toward the western horizon, until, growing continually less and less pronounced, they finally settled down into vast level stretches, forming the Plains proper bordering the Rockies. Throughout this entire distance, although usually imperceptible to the eye, the earth's surface had a steady upward trend. The land became more arid, the rainfall perceptibly less, the waters of the rivers diminished in volume, the atmosphere grew lighter, and the luxuriant herbage of the Eastern prairies changed into the short, nutritious buffalo grass of the Western plateaus. All tree growth completely disappeared, nothing remaining to break the drear desolation except the ghostly cactus, or the diminutive Spanish bayonet, with here and there a naked sage bush, grim flower of the desert.

### Three Distinct Belts to be Crossed

To the traveller advancing due west from the Missouri there were three distinct belts, averaging



AN INDIAN ENCAMPMENT IN THE BAD LANDS

1000

1000

1000

1000

## NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS

about one hundred and fifty miles each, through which his slow-moving caravan passed before attaining to the mountains. The first was agriculturally rich, a magnificent prairie land, possessing abundant rain, fertile soil, sufficient timber along the numerous water-courses, and in every direction delighting the eye. The next hundred and fifty miles, stretching from about the 98th meridian to the 101st, brought a notable change. The rolling, verdure-decked hills, began to sink away into monotonous plains; the soil became less rich, and was streaked with alkali; the waters of the streams diminished and grew unfit to drink; while vegetation became dwarfed and scanty. The cactus, the sagebrush, and the prairie dog were much in evidence. A suffocating dust rose from the trail under the horses' feet. The third division of the journey, extending to the 104th meridian, was that hilly region which led on to those great mountain ranges already plainly in sight. Here the traveller was in the midst of rocky, barren desolation, at first a drear, grim expanse of desert, but gradually improving in vegetation and water as he approached closer to the mountains.

### Perils of the Journey

But not only in its surface configuration was this a peculiar country. Its fierce storms, its mirages, its perilous prairie fires, the swiftness of attack by its mounted Indians, rendered it distinct from all other frontiers. Except in the spring of the year

## THE GREAT PLAINS

the prairie trails were easily followed. In time of rain the fords across the streams became dangerous, the prairie roads were transformed into quagmires, and no shelter was obtainable. The storms, at whatever season they occurred, were fierce and terrific. Those of summer were cyclonic, often working great damage, while in winter the awful blizzard was almost certain death to any unfortunate caught unprotected upon the open plain. During the summer season, after the prairie grass had become long and dry, destructive fires raging over immense districts threatened terrible disaster to all in their course. When driven by a strong wind such a fire became a veritable travelling furnace, bringing death to everything in its passage. The fleetest horse could not outrun its leaping flames, and the only probability of escape lay in prompt back-firing. At night the glare of miles of flame made a magnificent spectacle if the observer could view the scene from some point of safety.

Perhaps the most distressing phenomena of the plains were the mirages. These were more noticeable in the south, being particularly vivid in the neighborhood of the Cimarron Desert. In the midst of the gray desolation would suddenly appear a sparkling river, or a gleaming lake. Everything would seem perfect, a breeze rippling the water, the shores distinctly outlined, yet it all faded away upon approach. Occasionally the mirage would assume other forms,—a large caravan, or a splendid

## NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS

city,—but ever it was a dissolving picture, which tantalized many a wearied traveller.

### The Flora

The flora and fauna of this vast region during the years of its invasion by the white man may be briefly summarized. The most important and practically the only tree was the cottonwood. The best known species was the broad-leaved, found along the lower water-courses, where the trunk occasionally attained to five feet in diameter, with a height of seventy. Higher up in the foot-hills the leaf became narrower. Cottonwood groves were favorite camping-places on the long trail, furnishing fuel, as well as logs for huts, and even food for horses. The bark was nutritious, and the animals not only liked it, but thrived upon it as well as upon oats. In some of the valleys the quaking ash was found, usually growing in small compact copses. It was a good wood for fuel. Toward the mountains pine, spruce, balsam, and fir abounded, while cedars were very numerous, but generally distorted and misshapen by the never-ceasing winds. Along most of the prairie streams there were willow growths, often forming extensive thickets, almost impenetrable, and closely crowding the bank.

Although the plains and most of the foot-hills and bad lands were absolutely destitute of trees, there were occasional extensive forests which became celebrated. The country about the Black Hills



## THE GREAT PLAINS

was heavily wooded. On the head-waters of the Neosho was the famous forest of Council Grove, a great camping-spot for caravans bound for Santa Fe. The Big Timbers of the Arkansas consisted of a large grove of cottonwoods extending for several miles along the northern bank of that stream, a little distance below the site of Bent's Fort. The Cross Timbers, composed mostly of dwarfish, stunted trees, was farther south, extending from the Brazos River in Texas, northwest to the Canadian. A branch ran westward across the Canadian North Fork. On the more open plains of the north the only growth was sage-brush and grease-wood, while to the southward the cactus and the Spanish bayonet reigned supreme. In Colorado the prickly pear was common, and on the drear plains of New Mexico the giant cactus took weird, fantastic forms.

But the most important vegetable productions of the entire region were the grasses. There were extensive barren spots, drear desolate deserts, but, speaking generally, no region in the world ever excelled the Plains as a grazing country. On the lower prairies and in the stream bottoms the growth was luxuriant, yet even upon the high plains, the table-lands and hills, were found grasses of value. One peculiarity of these grasses is that they retain their nutritive power after the season of growth is over, even under the snow of winter. The three chief ones were the gramma grass, the buffalo grass,

## NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS

and the bunch grass. Of these the last was most widespread and valuable.

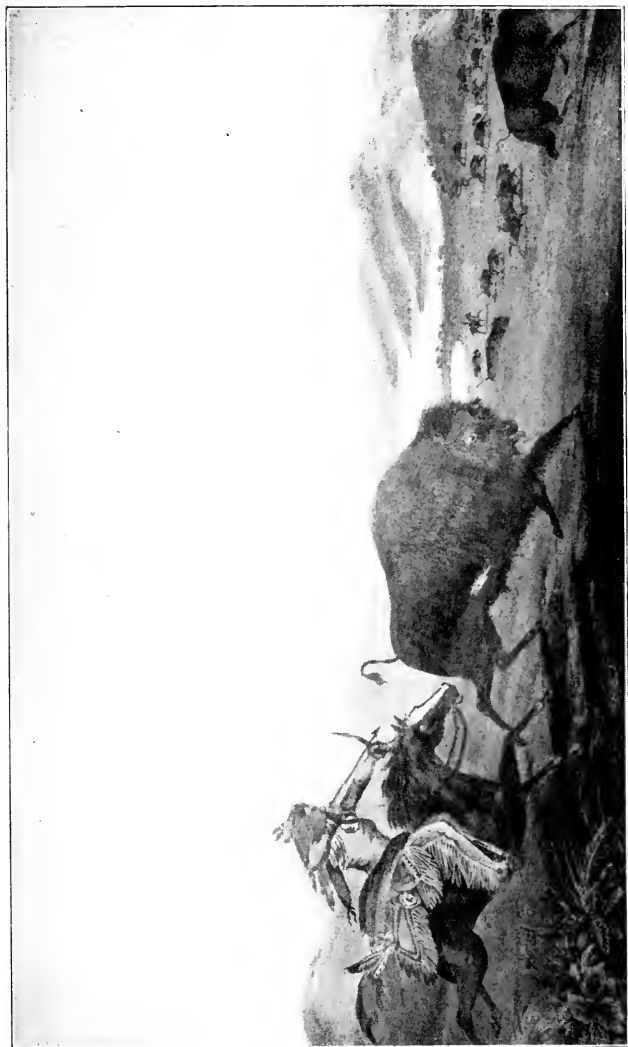
### The Fauna

In this extensive region the most important animals were the buffaloes, not only because of their number but also owing to their value to the Indian. The buffalo furnished sustenance for all the tribes of the Plains. Almost everything the Indian required was furnished by the buffalo—his food, his bed, his clothes, his weapons of war and chase, his boats, his saddles, and most of the articles required for domestic use. The story of the buffalo can never be written in its entirety. Beyond doubt the range of these strange shaggy beasts, called by the first Spanish explorers “deformed cattle,” at one time extended from the Rocky Mountains to the Alleghanies. But steadily they were forced westward. It is impossible to contend that this retreat was caused by the advance of the white man, for it largely antedated white occupancy. As early as 1807 the range of the buffalo had receded as far as the 97th meridian. When first known to early explorers of the Plains the great herds roamed from the Missouri to the Rockies, and from near the Gulf to 60 degrees north latitude. The multitude of these animals, within the memory of men yet living, was almost beyond belief. No enumeration was ever satisfactory, but it is incontrovertible that they

## THE GREAT PLAINS

numbered millions upon millions. Railroad trains and steamboats have been held up for hours to permit vast herds to pass. Innumerable trails worn by their hoofs are yet visible. The slight statistics relating to their slaughter in later years are evidence of the vastness of their original numbers. The American Fur Company in 1840 sent to St. Louis sixty-seven thousand robes, and in 1848, one hundred and ten thousand. Twenty-five thousand buffalo tongues were brought to that city the same year. As early as 1860 it was estimated by competent authority that at least 250,000 buffalo were being killed yearly. As late as 1871 Colonel Dodge writes of riding for twenty-five miles in western Kansas through an immense herd, the whole country about him appearing a solid mass of moving buffalo. In that year the animals moved northward on their annual migration in a column from twenty-five to fifty miles wide and of unknown depth from front to rear. In the later migrations, as observed by whites, the buffalo columns usually crossed the Arkansas River somewhere between Great Bend and Big Sand Creek. Colonel Dodge estimates that in the three years 1872-74 at least five million buffalo were slaughtered for their hides.

Other animals having habitat on the Great Plains may be considered briefly. Along nearly all the streams was to be found the beaver, while out upon the prairies, far from his mountain lair, wandered the ferocious grizzly bear in search of food.



THE BUFFALO HUNT

6061

## NATURE OF THE GREAT PLAINS

The black bear seldom left the foot-hills. Elk, various species of deer, and antelope were numerous. The wolf was the most ignoble of the inhabitants of the Plains. The gray wolf was largest and most troublesome, although the coyote made night hideous with its unending yowls. Panthers and wildcats were frequently encountered, while the prairie dog was almost always in evidence in the more desolate regions.

Next to the buffalo, however, the most important animal of the Plains was the wild horse. The horse was a comparatively recent arrival, not native to America, but introduced by the Spaniards into Mexico. It multiplied with great rapidity, overspreading all the southern Plains, where it was captured by the Indians, and gradually taken north. As early as 1700 it was in quite general use. The wild horses ran in droves often of considerable size, under the leadership of a stallion. They were taken usually by the lasso, although occasionally "creasing" was the method employed. This consisted of shooting a rifle ball through the top of the neck so as to cut a nerve, and render the animal for a short time insensible. Thousands were caught for the market in the early days of white occupancy, and as late as 1894 a few bands were still running free in the Texas Pan-Handle.

### Transformation Wrought by Civilized Man

We have now before us a fairly accurate picture of the Great Plains as they appeared when

## THE GREAT PLAINS

first viewed by the eyes of white explorers. To those of this present generation, who view plain and prairie from the windows of express trains, the original desolation of the broad expanse can scarcely be conceivable. To-day farmhouses, growing cities, and prosperous towns dot the miles, railways annihilate distance, while foreign trees, transplanted and cultivated with care, beautify the changed landscape. The labor and skill of civilized man, the gradual increase of rainfall, the development of irrigation, have all combined to work a modern miracle, redeeming the arid waste. The desert has become transformed into a garden. Only occasionally may the searching eye discern evidences of what once was, and that so few years since, a sterile, savage-haunted desolation, in midst of which adventurous souls toiled and died, or struggled and achieved. The American frontier has ever proven a developer of character, and a scene of constantly recurring contest against the perils of the wilderness and against savagery. But the Plains produced a peculiar type of pioneer,—brother, indeed, to him of the Eastern woods and mountains, yet changed and marked by the environment amid which he wrought his destiny and lived his life. The story of his struggle and triumph is unsurpassed in the annals of white endeavor.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INDIANS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

#### The Prehistoric Period

THE history of this vast prairie land, from that far-off age when immense ice masses left their marks on its surface to the time of the coming of the first adventurous Spaniard, is an unwritten, untraceable story. We may believe much, yet can know but little. Tradition here and there slightly lifts an edge of the curtain, but merely to afford glimpses of savagery. No doubt centuries of conflict had been waged; tribes had arisen to power, only to be annihilated; others had been driven from place to place; yet all those ages had witnessed no more than a slight uplifting from the lowest form of savagery to a rude barbarism. Any serious effort to reveal the secrets of this period would be but wasted energy.

But from the earliest ages the Plains must have been marvellous hunting-grounds, the natural habitat of a great variety of animal life, and consequently overrun by aborigines in the chase. From this cause alone the struggle for possession must have been unending, fierce, and relentless. From the Missouri to the Rockies, during unknown centuries, was a trail of blood, a continuous scene of tribal hatred, of unbridled ferocity. Undoubtedly there



## THE GREAT PLAINS

were spaces of comparative neutrality, yet safety was never assured when wandering parties of hunters met by chance in the wilderness. Hatred, jealousy, revenge held supreme sway; the war-club and the tomahawk were the rulers of the wide domain.

While he was of the same race, and in nature similar, the environment of the Plains Indian made him in many respects different from the red man of the Eastern forests and mountains. Equally savage, relentless, and courageous, the wide open space of his home had marked him with certain characteristics which made him a yet more dreaded antagonist. Above all, he possessed the horse, which afforded a vast advantage in a military sense, the celerity of movement being advantageous both for attack and escape. It was the mounted Indian with whom the pioneers of the prairies were obliged to contend in their struggle for possession.

### Condition of the Indians at the Arrival of the Spaniards

While it remains true that an Indian is always an Indian, yet each tribe has its own peculiarities. In North America, north of Mexico, there were nearly sixty distinct languages spoken, which apparently had no relation to one another, not even a common origin. Almost as widely different were various tribes in culture. The Northern Indians, were, at the coming of the whites, practically in the Stone Age of development. The use of metals was unknown. Native copper was indeed utilized

## THE INDIANS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

to some extent, but it was merely hammered into usefulness. The Indian's weapons were of stone, his clothing of skin, his pottery of the simplest kind, his subsistence derived almost entirely from hunting and fishing. Some slight agriculture was practised, such as the raising of corn, beans, and squashes, but the chase was the main means of support.

### Locations and Characteristics of the Tribes

The greater number of the Plains tribes were wandering and predatory, although a few along the Missouri, and in the Southwest dwelt in permanent villages. Even the predatory tribes had some particular section to which they always returned, yet they were essentially a nomadic people, taking long journeys for purposes of the chase or war. Those tribes with which we have most directly to do in this narrative belonged to several great linguistic stocks—the Algonquin, the Siouan, the Shoshonean, the Caddoan, and the Kiowan. Of the first, those residing within the district to be considered were the Arapahoes, the Cheyennes, and the Grosventres of the prairie. The tribes of the Siouan stock occupied nearly the whole of the valley of the Missouri with a wide extent of territory on either side. Those of special interest in the story of the Plains were the Mandans, Sioux, Poncas, Omahas, Iowas, Otoes, Kansas, and Osages. Of the great Shoshone family only the Comanches roamed over the prairie country, their region being south of the Arkansas.

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The Caddoans were represented by two tribes, the Pawnees and the Aricaras. The Kiowas were a distinct stock.

We will endeavor to take up these tribes and locate them as they were first known to the whites. The Grosventres of the prairie were a part of the great Blackfeet nation, having their home in the mountains to the northwest. They were a relentlessly warlike tribe, yet always maintained a specially friendly relation with the Arapahoes, who held the country about the South Fork of the Platte. It was the custom of the Grosventres to visit the Arapahoes every two or three years. The result of their visits was invariably war with other tribes through whose boundaries they were obliged to pass, and incidentally with any unfortunate white men encountered on the way. Trappers and fur-traders suffered greatly at their hands. The Arapahoes of the South Platte were somewhat inferior in stature to the Grosventres, but resembled them in face and dress. Their distinctive tribal feature was the tattooed breast. They also permitted their hair to grow to great length, even occasionally using false hair. They were a wandering tribe, living in tents of skin. During the early days of exploration they numbered about two thousand five hundred souls. They had little trouble with neighboring Indians, excepting the Pawnees and Utes, but were hostile to the whites, until they became interested in the fur trade about 1832, when Captain Gant

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established a trading-post in their country, and won their confidence. They were natural traders, and were considered more honest than most Indians.

### Tribes Met by the Earliest Explorers

The earliest explorers in the fur trade came more directly in contact with those tribes, mostly of the Siouan stock, inhabiting the valley of the Missouri. Of these the Mandans were particularly interesting. Early writers had much to say of this people because their country was for many years the farthest point achieved in the fur trade. Up to 1830 very few travellers got beyond the villages of the Mandans. Before the arrival of the whites they were a great nation, numbering at least six thousand souls, and occupying nine villages. But war and smallpox ravaged these towns until, at the visit of Lewis and Clark, they numbered scarcely two thousand. In 1837 the smallpox again visited them, and only about thirty of the tribe survived. They were a stationary people, living in permanent villages, and relying largely upon agriculture for subsistence, although great hunters of the buffalo. Of fine appearance, robust and broad-shouldered, they were a peaceably disposed tribe, and remained on friendly terms with the whites.

What is now the State of South Dakota was in early days the home of the Sioux, or, in their own language, the Dakotas. Their numbers, when first brought into relationship with the fur-traders, was

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probably fifteen thousand. In physical appearance they were typical Plains Indians, of stalwart physique and great endurance. They were a nomadic race, their wanderings taking them far in every direction, and were exceedingly warlike, being constantly in battle against their neighbors. They were divided into three tribes—the Yanktons, the Yanktonais or Yanktons of the Plains, and the Tetons. The first of these dwelt along the Missouri River, in the valleys of the James, the Vermilion, and the Big Sioux, extending even as far east as the Des Moines. They numbered about a thousand, and gave the whites but little trouble. The Yanktonais, numbering about two thousand five hundred, were the most dreaded among the Sioux. They occupied the upper valleys of the James and the Big Sioux, ranging eastward to the Red River of the North, and west a long distance up the Missouri. A favorite pastime was to ambuscade the traders' boats on the river. The Tetons was the largest tribe, containing five thousand souls. They dwelt mostly west of the Missouri, overspreading the country to the Black Hills and the North Platte; the Ogallalas composed the more southern branch, dwelling near the head-waters of the White and Niobrara Rivers.

The most dangerous Indians encountered by the Missouri River fur-traders were the Aricaras, or Rees, a tribe of the Caddoan stock. This people held their place in the very heart of the great

## THE INDIANS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

Sioux nation, and the remains of their ancient villages, used in the day of their power, could be traced all the way from the Niobrara to the Cannon Ball along the Missouri. When Lewis and Clark visited them they numbered three thousand six hundred. Previous to 1830 these Indians lived in clay huts similar to those of the Mandans. Physically they were tall and well formed, and their women were considered the handsomest on the Missouri. So far as the whites were concerned the Aricaras were always treacherous and warlike. It was impossible to trust them in any way; they were friends to-day, and bitter enemies to-morrow.

### The Cheyennes and Pawnees

Leaving the valley of the Missouri and moving westward to the eastern and southern base of the Black Hills, the traveller entered the country of the Cheyennes, who were of Algonquin stock. How long this people occupied that district, or from whence they came, is uncertain. That they were kindred to the Arapahoes seems probable, and as early as 1820 many of the tribe seceded and joined the other. By 1840 all the remainder had moved south, where they also became affiliated with their kindred. Misfortune had made of them wanderers, but they were always a virile race, magnificent horsemen and superb warriors. While ever at war with surrounding tribes, with the whites they were usually at peace, although when they took the war-

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path they proved dangerous enemies. Their principal traffic was in horses, and this trade led them to become great travellers across the prairies.

South and east, within the present limits of the State of Nebraska, their centre of power the Loup Fork of the Platte, was the great nation of the Pawnees. They possessed four distinct villages, or divisions, the Grand Pawnees, the Republican Pawnees, the Noisy Pawnees, and the Pawnee Loups. The latter were probably a conquered people at one time associated with the Aricaras. The Tapage, or Noisy Pawnees, were the least important; they were not mentioned at all by Pike, who visited this country in 1806. Fourteen years later Long found the Pawnees living about sixty miles above the mouth of the Loup. The Grand Pawnees were farthest down stream and numbered about three thousand five hundred. Three miles above were the Republican Pawnees with a population of one thousand, while the Loups, four miles beyond, had two thousand. They were village tribes, being agriculturists as well as hunters, and dwelt in lodges, some of which were fully sixty feet in diameter, circular in form, having conical roofs of easy slope. The Pawnees were tall, slender, but well muscled. They excelled in horsemanship, having no superiors on the Plains. Though they possessed permanent villages, they were great wanderers, but generally travelled to the south or southwest, being frequently encountered along the Arkansas and on the old Santa Fe Trail. They fought with all sur-

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rounding tribes, and made no steadfast alliances. During many years they were the terror of those traders who were obliged to traverse their country or to skirt its borders. In earlier years of exploration they held friendly relations with the Spaniards, and exhibited great hostility to American advance. The fur-traders never built a permanent post in their country, but met and traded with them at Council Bluffs.

### The Indians of the Missouri Valley

Along the lower valley of the Missouri were found the Poncas, the Omahas, the Kansas, and the Osages. These were at one time a single nation dwelling in the Ohio Valley near the mouth of the Wabash. The cause of separation is unknown, but on coming West the Osages and Kansas settled in the valleys of the streams now bearing their names, while the others pressed on, the Omahas halting on the west bank of the Missouri above the mouth of the Platte, and the Poncas near the mouth of the Niobrara. At the coming of the first white traders the latter had been reduced by smallpox and war to barely two hundred souls, and the Omahas scarcely numbered four hundred. The Kansas tribe numbered one thousand five hundred. All these people were friendly to the whites, and figure little in the romantic history of the Plains. The Osages were the most important of the four divisions, being the first Indians of the prairies to open a regular trade with the whites. For many years previous to



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1800 (exact dates unknown), Pierre Chouteau had business relations in their villages, and at that time Manuel Lisa obtained Spanish permission to establish a permanent trading-post in their country. The struggle between these two traders divided the tribe. While generally friendly, the Osages were inclined to organize marauding parties, which did much injury to small companies passing through their neighborhood.

As previously mentioned, the country bordering the South Platte was the home of the Arapahoes, whose headquarters were near the present site of the city of Denver. Here these Indians conducted a sort of fair, exchanging articles procured from the Spanish on the south for the more northern furs. The word Arapahoe is said to mean "he who buys, or trades." Closely associated with them in the earliest days of white exploration were the Kiowas. Later, during the struggle for possession, a yet stronger alliance was made by this latter tribe with the Comanches. For many years the Kiowa warriors roamed freely over the entire Arapahoe and Comanche country, extending from the South Platte to the Brazos. Their favorite rendezvous seems to have been the valley of the Arkansas near the mouth of the Purgatory River. The Kiowas were little known by name in the early fur trade, but probably many an atrocity charged to the Comanches or the Arapahoes was really committed by these wanderers. A late authority refers to them as being "the most predatory and bloodthirsty" of the



# TYPES OF INDIAN CHIEFS

PAWNEE TRIBE  
OMAHA TRIBE

OSAGE TRIBE  
MANDAN TRIBE



## THE INDIANS OF THE GREAT PLAINS

prairie tribes; and adds, "They have probably killed more white men in proportion to their number than any of the others."

The Comanches resided to the south of the Arkansas River, occupying portions of what is now Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. They were the only tribe of the great Shoshone family dwelling exclusively upon the Plains. In the fullest sense they were a wandering people, perhaps the most restless of all American tribes. In the wide region they controlled, it is impossible to name any particular spot which they held as a favorite residence. They moved north and south according to the season, but otherwise merely as fortune dictated. The wealth of the Comanche, and the centre of his interest, was the horse. The tribe were probably the most expert riders of the Western Plains, being trained from infancy. Their remarkable skill in the handling of horses was the wonder of all who witnessed it. They marked their animals with a peculiar slit in the ear, and neither love nor money could induce them to part with a favorite mount. In personal characteristics they resembled their neighbors to the north, the Arapahoes, but, owing to the southern climate, they wore less clothing. One peculiarity was that they did not greatly care for liquor. From the first they were a dangerous tribe, always at war with both red and white. For years they were the terror of the Plains, dreaded from the Arkansas to the Rio Grande del Norte. Every inch of white advance through their country

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had to be fought for, and they made the Santa Fe Trail a trail of blood.

Such were the inhabitants of the Great Plains when the pioneers of the conquering white race first ventured to set foot on that broad domain—widely differing tribes of Indians, many at war with each other, a few in alliances of peace. A small section was held as neutral ground, possibly the southern portion of what is now Kansas; but over that roamed hunting parties of Pawnees, Arapahoes, Kiowas, and Comanches, the fighting tribes, and wherever they met there was battle to the death. Magnificent warriors all of them, superb horsemen, loving to struggle with all the ferocity of wild animals. Jealous of their hunting-grounds, they were as one in their desire to keep back white invasion, and in the clash of arms they turned the prairies red. To plainsmen and soldiers, Spaniards and Americans, they proved foemen worthy of their steel.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST SPANIARDS

#### Early Spanish Explorations

**T**HE earliest exploration of the New World, after the discovery by Columbus, took place to the south, and was performed by soldiers and adventurers of Spain. It was most natural that the shores bordering the Gulf of Mexico should be first invaded from the West Indies, and the wealth of Mexico was a magnet to attract the invaders. As a result, that country was in Spanish hands long before the vast region now known as the United States had even been penetrated by explorers. Expeditions bound westward had here and there touched its shores, much of the coast-line of Florida had been traced, and De Pineda had discovered by accident the mouth of the Mississippi; but the vast continent within remained unknown and mysterious.

#### Cabeza de Vaca's Travels from Florida to Mexico

Eight years after De Pineda's brief pause on the Louisiana coast, and in the year 1527, only thirty-five years after Columbus placed foot on Cat Island, the first Spaniard penetrated that interior. This man was Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the treasurer of an expedition sent from Spain for the exploration of Florida. The commander of his company was Panfilo de Narvaez. The experience of

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these explorers was frightful. They struggled across Florida from the Atlantic coast to the Gulf. Here they built rude boats, and killed their horses for food. The manes and tails were utilized for ropes; stirrups and spurs were made into tools and nails, and the shirts of the men were pieced together for sails. Thus equipped, the miserable company put to sea. Ignorant of their position, they hoped to reach Mexico and the Spanish settlements. Skirting the shore, they had just passed the mouth of the Mississippi when a severe storm wrecked their five boats, and only fifteen men survived. These were cast upon an island.

Of this remnant all but four were slain by the Indians. The survivors were made prisoners, and separated, not meeting again for six years. Cabeza de Vaca, the only one of the party who has left a record of these events, was held by his savage masters in what is now eastern Texas and western Louisiana. His treatment was that of a slave, although finally he was permitted to act as a medicine man, and even trusted to conduct trade. On one of these trading journeys he travelled as far north as the Red River, thus penetrating for a considerable distance into the land of the Great Plains, and becoming the first white man to behold the "hunchbacked cows," as the early Spanish writers termed the buffaloes. At some point, now unknown, but certainly west of the Sabine River, he became reunited with his three surviving companions. These were Dorantes, Castillo Maldonado, and a negro called

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Stephen. The four succeeded in escaping together from their savage captors, and made their way slowly westward through the regions of various tribes, finding safety by pretending to be medicine men. Their hope was to reach the Spanish settlement in Mexico; but historians differ widely as to the route followed in their long wanderings. Some contend that the four strayed as far north as the Arkansas, but it seems far more probable that their journey was over the southern Plains, crossing the Rio Pecos not far above its junction with the Rio Grande. De Vaca wrote an account of his experiences, and, without doubt, his little party were the first whites to traverse the Great Plains and gaze upon the towering Rockies. His description of the buffalo is quaintly interesting.

### De Vaca's Description of the Buffalo

"Cattle come as far as this. I have seen them three times and eaten of their meat. I think they are about the size of those of Spain. They have small horns, like the cows of Morocco, and the hair very long and flocky, like that of the Merino; some are light brown, others black. To my judgment the flesh is finer and fatter than that of this country. The Indians make blankets of the hides of those not full grown. They range over a district of more than four hundred leagues, and in the whole extent of plain over which they run the people that inhabit near there descend and live on them, and scatter a vast many skins throughout the country."

Turning southward, De Vaca and his companions finally reached Culiacan in Sinaloa, the more northern Spanish outpost, in May, 1536. Their



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wanderings through the wilderness had taken them over two thousand miles.

### De Soto's Expedition and Death

De Vaca, who was a small man, possessed a large imagination and a garrulous tongue. His description of the wondrous region traversed, and the marvellous stories told him by Indians during captivity, aroused the adventurous spirits of two worlds. Both Spain and Mexico organized expeditions for exploration and conquest. These were so nearly of a date, and came so close to overlapping each other in the wilderness, that it is difficult to choose which should be first described. To most readers that commanded by Fernando de Soto will appeal as the more important. De Soto sailed from Spain, April 6, 1538, with an armament of ten vessels, and a splendidly equipped army of nine hundred men. Landing in Florida, they fought a bloody passage across Georgia and Alabama, and westward to the Mississippi River. This stream, now first seen above its mouth by white men, was crossed at Chickasaw Bluff. From here the little army, now sadly decimated and in desperate plight, marched northward to Little Prairie, always encouraged to persevere by vague tales of gold, ever the object of the Spaniard. From this point the commander despatched numerous expeditions, one of which attained to the open prairies. Another must have nearly reached the Missouri River, although De Soto learned nothing as to its whereabouts. At this time,

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during the Summer of 1541, some of De Soto's followers may have been very close to that other force of Spanish adventures which, under Coronado, was then advancing from the west. Indeed, the latter learned of the presence of mysterious white men in his front, and despatched a messenger seeking them, but the man failed in his effort. "Thus," as Ripley Hitchcock says, "in the first half of the sixteenth century two Spaniards, one starting from Tampa Bay in Florida, and the other from the Gulf of California, practically completed a journey across the continent."

Disappointed, and constantly harassed by Indians, De Soto turned southward, and passed a bitter winter on the Washita. In May, 1542, the intrepid leader died near the mouth of Red River, and his body was buried secretly, beneath the night shades, under the waters of the vast stream he had discovered cleaving the wilderness.

### Wanderings of the Survivors

Luis de Mosquito became the commander of the miserable remnant. Hoping thus to reach their countrymen in New Spain, and possibly having some vague knowledge of Coronado's presence in the neighborhood, the survivors started westward. Where they went is not altogether clear, but it is believed they penetrated the country of the Plains to so great a distance as to perceive the western mountains. The historian of that journey says:

"The entire route became a trail of fire and blood. The

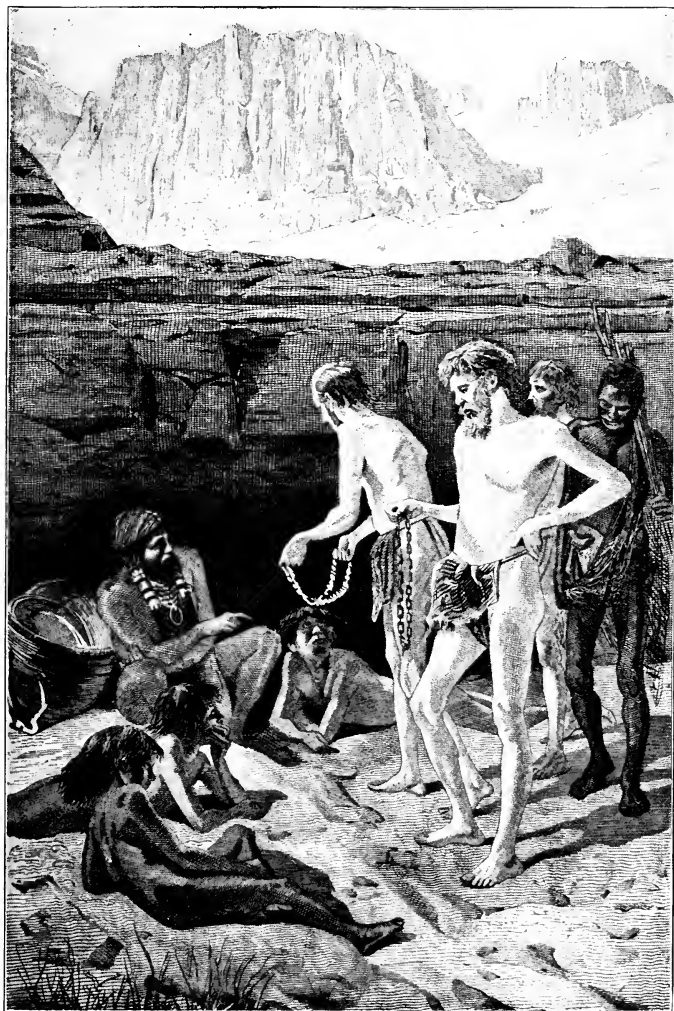
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savages of the Plains were of gigantic stature, and fought with heavy, strong clubs, with the desperation of demons. Such was their tremendous strength that one of these warriors was a match for a Spanish soldier, though mounted on a horse, armed with a sword, and cased in armor."

De Moscoco and his men passed six months of terrible hardship in this region, but, if his object was the finding of Coronado's party, he failed. The probability is his course was too far to the south, for Coronado at this time was in camp near the present location of Wichita, Kansas, or, according to his chronicler, "at the junction of the St. Peter and St. Paul," now the Big and Little Arkansas. Finally discouraged, the little band retraced their steps to the Mississippi, where they built boats, and floated down to the Gulf. In September, 1543, the miserable remnant reached safety at Tampico.

### Coronado's Search for the Seven Golden Cities

At almost the identical time that De Soto began his struggles westward from Florida, another Spanish officer, Coronado, Governor of New Galicia, was leading his soldiers eastward from the coast of the Pacific. The story of De Vaca about the fabulous seven golden cities of Cibola, filled with treasure, had aroused a spirit of adventure among the Spaniards of Mexico. As early as 1539 Fray Marcos de Nizza left Sinaloa, taking with him as guide the negro Stephen who had been De Vaca's companion. The negro lost his life on the trip, but his white comrade returned, and his report served only



CABEÇA DE VACA AND HIS COMPANIONS



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to increase the excitement. Determined to discover the truth and unearth the mysterious treasure, Mendoza, Viceroy of Mexico, organized an expedition, and gave the command to Francisco Vasquez Coronado. It was a well equipped and ably officered body of men. This company started north from the shores of the Gulf of California in 1540, and, after much hardship and some fighting, captured the Zuni villages where the negro Stephen had been killed, and finally wintered in New Mexico. While encamped here, Coronado heard a legend of Quivira, a wonderful city of gold situated somewhere to the northeast. Lured by this mirage, as soon as the spring permitted, he pressed forward into the Great Plains of Texas, travelling in a wide arc to the north. Of this journey one of his soldiers, Pedro Castaneda, has written a detailed report. Some of his pictures of those strange scenes through which they passed are extremely vivid.

### Castaneda's Description of the Buffalo

"From Cieuye they went to Quivira, which, after their account, is almost three hundred leagues distant, through mighty plains and sandy heaths so smooth and wearisome and bare of wood, that they made heaps of ox-dung, for want of stones and trees, that they might not lose themselves on their return; for three horses were lost on that plain, and one Spaniard which went from his company on hunting. . . . All that way of plains are as full of crooked-back oxen as the mountain Serrena in Spain is of sheep, but there is no such people as keep those cattle. . . . They were a great succour for the hunger and the want of bread, which our party stood in need of. . . . One day it rained in that plain, a great shower of hail as big

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as oranges, which caused many tears, weakness, and bowes.... These oxen are of the bigness and color of our bulls, but their bones are not so great. They have a great bunch upon their foreshoulder and more hair on their fore-part than on their hinder-part and it is like wool. They have as it were a horse-mane upon their backbone and much hair and very long from their knees downward. They have great tufts of hair hanging down on their foreheads and it seemeth they have beards because of the great store of hair hanging down at their chins and throats. The males have very long tails and a great knob or flock at the end, so that in some respects they resemble the lion, and in some other the camel. They push with their horns, they run, they overtake and kill a horse when they are in their rage and anger. Finally it is a foul and fierce beast, of countenance and form of body. The horses fled from them, either because of their deformed shape, or else because they had never seen them before. . . . The number was incredible. . . . The soldiers chasing them, they rushed together in such masses that hundreds were crushed to death."

At one place there was a great ravine, into which the animals plunged in terror, and the depression was completely filled up with their bodies, so that the living crossed upon the bridge thus formed of the dead.

The exact route followed by Coronado and his men can never be known, for, in spite of Castaneda's detailed description, there is such a sameness in the Plains country that prominent landmarks are difficult to find. Undoubtedly, however, the little band of adventurers found their way across the desert of the Staked Plains from about where Albuquerque, New Mexico, now stands, then the Indian village of Tiguex, to the upper waters of the Colorado. They were at this time in the country of the wild-

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riding Comanches, to whom they gave the name Querechos. This advance also brought them into the heart of the buffalo region, and they saw huge herds covering the Plains as far as the eye would carry. From here they turned their course north and slightly east, crossing the Brazos, the Red, and Canadian Rivers, until they attained the banks of the Arkansas, probably near the present site of Wichita. The company camped here for several months, a considerable contingent returning south; but finally Coronado, with the small party left him, pressed resolutely forward into northeastern Kansas. His highest mark north is generally believed to be the line separating that State from Nebraska. Here he discovered a tribe of Indians called the Quiviras, but they had no gold, and knew of none. Discouraged, the Spaniards, after a halt of twenty-five days, were forced to turn back empty-handed. On this return march a more direct route was followed, southwest through the Cimarron Desert, until the weary wanderers arrived once more at the welcome village of Tiguex. Here, under date of October 20, 1541, Coronado wrote his report of the expedition.

### Padilla's Mission to the Quiviras

A journey into the Plains far longer and more perilous immediately followed his return. With Coronado was a brave priest, Fray Juan de Padilla. Impressed by the needs of the savages of the Quiviras tribe he voluntarily returned to minister unto them. He was accompanied by one soldier, Andres



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Docampo, and two boys, Lucas and Sebastian. Another priest, Fray Juan de la Cruz, was in some way also associated with this mission. They reached in safety the region sought, and later went even farther north, seeking the country of the Grand Quivira. After travelling several days they came to a large settlement. This was probably in the valley of the Platte, and not far from the present situation of Columbus, Nebraska. The Indians coming out prepared for battle, the priest De Padilla bade his attendants withdraw while he went forward to meet them alone. From the bluffs they witnessed all that happened to the friar. Awaiting the coming of the savages upon his knees in prayer, the priest was instantly put to death. Fray de la Cruz was also killed later, but Docampo and the boys succeeded in escaping, wandering over the Plains through nine terrible years of suffering, before finally reaching the Spanish settlements in Mexico. Their journeying as prisoners and fugitives must have covered thousands of miles all over the Plains country, but no records relating to it have been preserved.

### Spanish Attempt to Settle on the Upper Mississippi

Beyond doubt in the lapse of time intervening between this adventure of Coronado and the next expedition of record across the Plains, individual Spaniards—hunters, priests, or soldiers—must have penetrated into this region of mystery. But if so, no writing remains to tell us what befell them. So

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far as history is concerned, the Great Plains remained hidden in their savagery from 1541 until 1716, when the Spaniards, then permanently established at Santa Fe, despatched an expedition eastward "for the purpose of establishing a military post in the upper Mississippi Valley as a barrier to the further encroachments of the French in that direction." This party was composed of about fifteen hundred people, soldiers, with settlers male and female, and a Jacobin for a chaplain. They had with them a great number of horses and cattle, and advanced slowly, their route being nearly that of the later famous Santa Fe Trail. So far as can be understood, one purpose of the expedition was to destroy an Indian tribe called the Missouris, and to seize upon their country. In this they counted upon another tribe, the Osages, as allies. Through some mistake the Spanish commander, believing himself in council with the latter, unfortunately revealed his plans to the very Indians he had come to destroy. The result was a trap into which the Spaniards walked unsuspectingly. Even while both parties were celebrating this new alliance two thousand armed warriors fell upon the whites, and in less than fifteen minutes had killed them all. No one escaped excepting the chaplain, whose peculiar costume attracted the Indians' curiosity. Fortunate for him, also, was the fact that to the Missouris the horse was then comparatively unknown. Ignorant of how to ride they compelled the priest to mount, and instruct them in horsemanship. He

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was kept at this for several months, yet none of his captors developed sufficient courage to emulate his example. Finally the Jacobin determined to escape. Waiting until he was mounted on the swiftest horse, he suddenly rode away and disappeared, making his way back to Mexico safe. This occurred not far from the present site of Leavenworth.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FRENCH EXPLORERS

#### Spanish Missions Established

**I**N THE closing years of the seventeenth and the opening years of the eighteenth century Spain did little toward exercising control over this vast region which had been explored by her daring adventurers. Established in some power at Santa Fe since about 1609, her pioneers were so harassed by the surrounding Indians that they had small opportunity or inclination for any further advance. However, the missionaries of the Church circulated widely among the tribes of the Plains, and exercised considerable influence. Permanent missions were established in various localities, and along the eastern slope of the Rockies some of these were supported by military garrisons; and Spanish traders are known to have penetrated as far north as the Arapahoe and Pawnee villages.

#### The French Explorers

Meanwhile the French, now firmly established about the Great Lakes and along the Mississippi, were reaching out westward in undisciplined exploration. Three purposes may be said to have controlled their efforts,—a desire to possess this land in advance of Spain; the insistent demands of the widening fur trade; and an ambition to discover

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some practicable route to the Pacific. As early as 1704, Bienville reported that over one hundred Canadians were already scattered along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. In 1705 one of these, named Laurain, claimed to have ascended the latter stream for a considerable distance; in 1719 Du Tisuc was certainly above Grand River, and a little later reached the village of the Osage Indians. Here he found difficulty in proceeding, but finally pushed on across the prairies to the encampment of the Pawnees. Their hostility compelled him to retire.

The earlier and more persistent advance of the French was from the garrisons of Louisiana on to the prairies of Texas. In 1714 Saint-Denis was sent by La Mothe Cadillac up Red River, and succeeded in reaching a point about sixty-eight leagues above Natchitoches. The following year he struck across the Plains toward the Spanish settlements, but was captured near the Rio Grande, and taken as a prisoner to Mexico. He was well treated, married a Spanish girl, and, after his release, attempted a second trip into the same country. This proved even more disastrous than his first, and the adventurer barely escaped with his life.

### The Expedition of De la Harpe

In March, 1719, Benard de la Harpe led a more important exploring expedition from the frontier post at Natchitoches westward into the prairie country. He had with him a sergeant and six

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privates. Their advance was up the Red River in canoes, but was soon brought to a halt by encountering that entanglement of driftwood, since known as the Red River raft, which completely choked the stream and forced them to take to the jungle. Nevertheless they pushed resolutely forward, dragging their canoes, until they again attained navigable water. At the end of a month of incessant labor they reached an Indian village about one hundred and eight leagues from the French post. After halting here for some time to rest and to build a trading-post, La Harpe, accompanied by ten men, white, red, and black, started forward again on foot to explore the country. He advanced to the northwest across hills, through forests, and over prairies, forded two branches of the Wichita, and, early in September, found himself on the banks of the Arkansas. Here he encountered a large number of Indians, probably Comanches, who were in direct trade with the Spaniards, and who informed him he could reach their country by ascending the river. Not being equipped for so long a journey La Harpe reluctantly returned to the fort on Red River. Two years later he attempted to explore the Arkansas by means of canoes, but accomplished little.

The Spanish expedition to the Missouri in 1721, already described, resulted in a corresponding advance of the French from the Illinois country. Bourgmont was the commander of the party which was despatched westward, his main object being trade with both Indians and Spaniards, and the

## THE GREAT PLAINS

establishment of peace with the Comanches. On the Missouri River, not far above the mouth of the Grand, he erected a trading-post of logs which was named Fort Orleans, and then started forth to march overland to the Comanche villages. He had with him Ensign Saint-Ange and a number of soldiers and Canadians, about twenty altogether, with a hundred and nine Missouri and sixty-eight Osage Indians. The party advanced slowly over a region which Bourgmont described as "a fine prairie country, with hills and dales, and clumps of trees to right and left." At the end of the sixth day of marching they reached the Kansas River, but here the leader was taken so severely ill that the expedition had to be abandoned. However, a soldier named Gaillard, volunteering for the service, was sent forward to the Comanche villages with a French message. It was an exceedingly perilous mission, but proved successful. The following September Bourgmont again departed westward on his mission of peace. This time he was accompanied by his young son, a surgeon, and nine soldiers. Reaching the village of the Kansas Indians he found there several Comanche warriors whom Gaillard had persuaded to meet him on the way. Here a great council was held, in which the Kansas, Missouris, Iowas, and Otoes were all represented. October eighth all these, together with some Omahas, joined in the march of the white men westward. Gaillard and a companion named Quesnel were despatched in advance on swift horses, while Bourg-

## THE FRENCH EXPLORERS

mont and his cavalcade of savage followers moved more slowly up the north bank of the Kansas River. It must have been an imposing spectacle. On the eleventh they forded the river about twenty leagues from its mouth, and struck out toward the southwest; in Parkman's words,—

“sometimes threading the grassy valleys of little streams, sometimes crossing the dry upland prairie, covered with the short, tufted, dull-green herbage since known as ‘buffalo grass.’ Wild turkeys clamored along every water-course, deer were seen on all sides, buffalo were without number, sometimes in grazing droves, and sometimes dotting the endless plain as far as the eye could reach. Ruffian wolves, white and gray, eyed the travellers askance, keeping a safe distance by day, and howling about the camp all night.”

Not until the eighteenth did they meet the Comanches, when the two couriers dashed suddenly into camp at the head of eighty warriors. Then all advanced together to the Comanche village, which was situated about three leagues distant. This spot was probably a little north of the Arkansas in the neighborhood of the Great Bend. Several days were spent here in feasting and making presents, after which, a satisfactory treaty of peace having been agreed upon, the whites took up their return journey to Fort Orleans.

No further explorations, or advance into the Great Plains were made by the French for fifteen years. In the meantime, however, their traders had pushed up the Missouri as far as the Mandan villages, but halted there under the impression that the river beyond swerved to the south into the Spanish



## THE GREAT PLAINS

possessions of New Mexico. Two brothers named Mallet, with six companions, finally penetrated the wide stretch of country lying between. These men pressed up the Platte to its South Fork; then, after following the latter stream for some distance, turned directly south across the plains of Colorado. Here they found no wood, but were compelled to build their camp-fires from the dried dung of the buffalo. They crossed the upper Arkansas, forded the Cimmaron, and, without special adventure, reached the Spanish town of Santa Fe in July, 1739. The next Spring they started on their return, three of the party crossing the Plains to the Pawnee villages, the others descending the Arkansas. This adventure led to others, but, so far as known, none of them met with success.

### Explorations by De la Verendrye, and by His Two Sons

Meanwhile other efforts were being made far to the north to unveil the mystery of this region; and while much of exploration takes place beyond the Plains, it is intimately connected with our present study, and cannot be ignored, particularly as it extended far to the south and west of the Missouri. From the year 1700 the French had made strenuous efforts to press their explorations westward through the country of the Sioux Indians in Minnesota and the Dakotas. Owing to the never ceasing hostility of these savages they had met with small success. In 1728 Pierre Gaultier de Varennes de la Verendrye, commanding a small post north of Lake Supe-

## THE FRENCH EXPLORERS

rior, determined on an endeavor to penetrate westward farther to the north, through the country of the Assiniboines, in search of the Western Sea. He found aid for his scheme in the Governor, Beauharnais, who took great interest in it; but the King would advance no money. All he would consent to do was to authorize De la Verendrye to proceed, at his own expense, pledging him as reward for his effort a future monopoly of the fur trade in the regions thus discovered. This, necessitating the building of a chain of forts throughout that northern wilderness, greatly delayed the exploration, and it was not until 1738 that the French leader made any definite advance. Accompanied by twenty men he pushed up the Assiniboine River until the shallows halted his canoes. Then, with some Indian guides, the little party struck out directly across the open prairies, until they reached the villages of the Mandans on the Missouri, about where Bismarck now stands. Hampered by the loss of the bag containing presents for the savages, and the desertion of his interpreter, De la Verendrye accomplished little of value. The Mandans knew of the Spaniards to the southward, but none of that race had ever visited them. At this time the tribe possessed six large villages, the smallest containing one hundred and thirty houses. Between this date and the visit by Lewis and Clark in 1804, smallpox had reduced them to two villages and three hundred and fifty warriors. Himself very ill, De la Verendrye left two of his men with the Mandans, to learn their

## THE GREAT PLAINS

language, and returned with the others to Fort La Reine, where he arrived February 11, 1739.

The effort at further exploration was taken up by the two sons of De la Verendrye in 1742. Making their way to the Mandans and taking some of those Indians for guides, they advanced west and south, over the prairies and across the "bad lands." In irregular course, owing to the peculiarity of the country traversed, the bold explorers journeyed beyond the Black Hills, and westward into Montana until they arrived amid the foot-hills of the Big Horn Range of the Rockies in Wyoming. It was in January, 1743, that white men first gazed upon these northern peaks. Both going and returning the De la Verendryes met various wandering tribes of Indians, mostly of the great Sioux family, yet they experienced no serious opposition. It was in July when the party returned to Fort La Reine, with much of interest to report; but a way to the Pacific was yet undiscovered. This effort, the last seriously attempted, marks the farthest west achieved by French adventure.

## CHAPTER V

### THE EXPEDITION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

#### The Two-Fold Object of the Expedition

**I**N THE interim between the return of the De la Verendryes and the transfer of all this great Western country to the United States, no organized effort at exploration is matter of record. Individual fur-traders, both French and American, certainly continued to penetrate the country as far as the Mandan villages, and possibly even to the mountains, while many of the prairie streams were followed by adventurous trappers in their search after beaver. Yet practically the country remained unknown, a vast untracked wilderness, scarcely pressed by adventurous white feet.

On the thirtieth of November, 1803, Louisiana was formally transferred by the French commissioners to the United States. The cost approximated \$15,000,000, and the full extent of territory involved was still a matter of doubt. One of the first acts of President Jefferson, following this consummation, was the organization of a Government expedition to determine the nature of the purchase and discover a route through the wilderness to the far-off Pacific. Up to that time little was known excepting

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the vague tales of Indians and illiterate trappers. As a preliminary during the winter following this acquisition of territory, brief explorations were made along the Red and Washita Rivers, and May 14, 1804, a carefully organized expedition started overland for the Pacific. Two men were associated as joint leaders, and, so far as known, worked in complete harmony. These were Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Both were men of proved courage, ability, and long frontier training. Their instructions allowed them great latitude, and involved careful study of the Indian tribes and the nature of the country traversed.

### Preparations and Outset

The Winter of 1803-1804 was passed in the neighborhood of St. Louis in preparation for the advance in the Spring. Particular attention was paid to the personnel of the little party, the men being carefully chosen for the task to be accomplished. Fourteen soldiers, nine frontiersmen, two French voyageurs, and a negro servant made up the list. In addition to these a corporal, together with six soldiers and nine boatmen, was detailed to accompany the party as far as the Mandan villages, then near the present site of Bismarck, North Dakota. Their means of transportation by water consisted of a keel boat fifty-five feet long, drawing three feet of water. Decked over at bow and stern, it contained forecastle and cabin, the space between being provided with lockers that could be raised to

## EXPEDITION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

form breastworks in case of attack. This boat had a sail and twenty-two oars. The two other boats were smaller and undecked, the one having seven, the other six oars.

While this expedition of Lewis and Clark merely skirted the Great Plains, its direct influence was of such importance that the story merits careful telling. Leaving their winter camp at the mouth of the Du Bois River on May 14, 1804, the boats began their slow and toilsome advance against the strong, yellow current of the Missouri. Before them was a journey of unknown peril, involving some eight thousand miles of travel upon strange waters, and across untracked mountains and plains. The early part of the voyage was uneventful, as it was along a watery highway long utilized in the fur trade. The only noteworthy incidents were the constant meetings with canoes bound for St. Louis, laden with furs. It was June 26 when, having left the State of Missouri, they made camp at the mouth of the Kansas River. Here they saw their first buffalo, and looked off across the great prairies. At this point the river-course changed to the northwest. As they pressed forward, skirting the Kansas shore, they made such careful description that even to-day nearly every camping-spot can be identified. By the middle of July they were between what are now Iowa and Nebraska, ever toiling ceaselessly against the sweep of the current, and meeting with numerous adventures. One fierce prairie storm was encountered, in which a boat narrowly escaped wreck,

## THE GREAT PLAINS

and there was much sickness among the men, caused probably by drinking the muddy river water.

### Councils with the Pawnees and the Sioux

July 21, they passed the wide shallow mouth of the Platte, meeting difficulties of navigation amid the sand bars, and being greatly disturbed in their night camp by the ceaseless howling of wolves. Ten miles above they went ashore, and despatched messengers to the villages of the Pawnees. It was not until August 3, however, that these Indians were met with. A council was held on the west side of the river several miles above the present site of Omaha, the gathered savages expressing a desire for peace. Other councils were held as the boats advanced, and while encamped near the site of the present Sioux City the only member of the expedition to lose his life died of colic. This was Sergeant Charles Floyd. By late August the explorers entered what is now South Dakota. They were then in the land of the Sioux, and knowing full well the fierce character of these savage rovers of the plain, they made every effort to hold council with them. This was successfully accomplished on the thirtieth of August, when the pipe of peace was smoked, and the Indians gave a weird dance in their honor.

Above Yankton the travellers found much to interest them, although they were not yet beyond the boundaries of the fur trade; frequently they met hardy voyageurs floating down on the muddy cur-



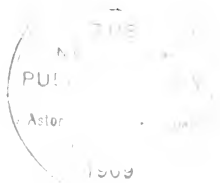
THE PRAIRIE



AN INDIAN BUFFALO HUNT

SCENES DURING THE INDIANS' SUPREMACY ON THE PLAINS





## EXPEDITION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

rent. Here sand ridges were seen so regular in formation as to be mistaken for the work of man. Among other things noted and described were antelope, prairie dogs, and the curious remains of one of the extinct giant reptiles of the Cretaceous period, which was described as the "backbone of a fish forty-five feet long, in a perfect state of petrification." In the country of the Teton Sioux, within the limits of the present Presho County, the explorers experienced their first serious difficulty with savages. Guns were drawn, but, after some hostile demonstration, a reconciliation was reached, and a peace council held. This was concluded by a scalp dance in which the noise was deafening.

### The Country of the Aricaras and that of the Mandans

In spite of their professions of friendship these same Sioux proved troublesome, constantly dogging the travellers along the river banks, and they were glad to escape and enter into the country of the Aricaras. These Indians proved friendly, and were noted as remarkable in that they refused a gift of whiskey, saying it would make them fools. Along here the travellers for the first time saw the grizzly bear, and the bighorn. Fur-traders were met, and proved of much assistance. It was now October, the weather growing cold, and on the twenty-first of that month the wearied travellers reached the mouth of Heart River, where the Northern Pacific Railroad now crosses the Missouri. Here they found the villages of the Mandans, and made prep-

## THE GREAT PLAINS

arations to spend the winter. On the north bank, about where the town of Stanton is now situated, the explorers erected some log huts, protected by a stockade. Much of interest occurred during the months passed here, the habits of the Mandans being intelligently studied. The Sioux were quite troublesome, but the deep snow prevented any campaign against them. Buffalo-hunting was indulged in, and, although the mercury sank to thirty-two degrees below zero, out-of-door sports were kept up. Several visits from fur-traders were received, but the most important happening was the engagement of an Indian interpreter named Chaboneau. His wife, Sacajawea (Bird Woman), a captive from the Snake Indians, proved a most valuable ally.

### From Stanton, North Dakota, into the Wilderness

April 7, 1805, the escort of soldiers started back down the river, and on the same day the expedition proper began its journey into what was from now on a truly unexplored wilderness. The thirty-two members embarked in two large boats and six canoes, and slowly propelled their way upstream. As they advanced they beheld wild geese and gophers, and soon came into the region of the sage-brush and alkali. As they now passed beyond the Plains into the mountains, our review of their experiences must be brief. On the twenty-fifth Captain Lewis and four men, travelling on foot, discovered the Yellowstone River, which was already known to French

## EXPEDITION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

trappers as La Roche Jaune. They saw great numbers of wild animals, and had several serious encounters with grizzly bears. They were now within the limits of the present Montana, passing in turn the mouths of Poplar and Milk Rivers, and the bed of a stream without water, which they named "Big Dry."

### The Watershed between Atlantic and Pacific

During this advance numerous adventures occurred, including the upsetting of canoes, and the falling of trees. At times they were obliged to tow their boats by a line from the shore. May 20 they were at the mouth of the Mussel-shell, twenty-two hundred and seventy miles from St. Louis, and six days later, from the summit of a high hill, Captain Lewis caught his first distant view of the Rocky Mountains. Coming to a division of the waters, much time was lost in determining which was the main stream, but they finally determined on the branch leading toward the southwest. Some distance farther on they were compelled to make a toilsome portage of eighteen miles, which caused a delay until June 27. This was at Great Falls, where a prosperous city now stands. Sacajawea was now in her own native land, and proved of much value as a guide; but the explorers themselves had to search for a pass through the mountains. At last, about the middle of August, the struggling company arrived at the source of the Missouri. They were now on foot, following an old Indian trail. This

## THE GREAT PLAINS

trail brought them to the dividing line between the waters of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Below ran a creek which emptied into the Columbia.

### On the Columbia

Pressing on through obstacles seemingly impossible, skirting the shores of wild mountain streams, suffering from lack of food, deceived by Indians, the undismayed explorers finally found a passage across the Bitter Root Range, and, September 20, came forth upon a great plain, and into the care of the Nez Percés, whose village stood near the present site of Pierce City, Idaho. Here they rested several days, finally advancing to the Kooskooskee River, where, in spite of much sickness, they built five canoes, and, October 8, started down the stream. Adventure followed adventure with startling frequency, but, in spite of smashed boats and Indian interruption, the men persevered and conquered; and, on the sixteenth of October, their battered canoes swept out upon the waters of the mighty Columbia, then known as the Oregon, or "River of the West." This great stream was henceforth to be their pathway to the sea.

The remainder of their westward journey, while prolific enough of hardships and perils, was but the drifting down with the current to the river's mouth. On the way they passed numerous Indian villages, but experienced little trouble with the savages; they ran falls and shot rapids, met with their first Flat-

## EXPEDITION OF LEWIS AND CLARK

heads, looked upon the wonders of Mount Hood, and at last discovered evidences that sea traders had penetrated even thus far into the interior. So, on November 7 they came forth into a view of the broad Pacific. That winter was passed in a comfortable camp of seven log cabins about three miles up the Netul River. The time was occupied in studying the country, observing the natives, and hunting. One hundred and thirty-one elk were killed, and over twenty deer.

### The Return Journey

The last of March the long return journey eastward was begun. It proved a laborious trip, as full of hardship and adventure as had been their advance. Several times they had serious encounters with hostile Indians. On April 24, having procured a few horses to transport their supplies, the entire party moved forward on foot across the mountains to the head-waters of the Missouri. Here they again constructed canoes and embarked on that stream. On August 12, near the mouth of Little Knife Creek, they met two fur-traders from Illinois. A few days later the entire company were safe in the village of the Mandans. September 23 they reached St. Louis, and were accorded a rousing welcome. As Ripley Hitchcock well observes, "The journey which they made is one of the world's greatest explorations, and its story has become a classic among the travel tales of history." While the discoveries thus made failed immediately to draw immigration

## THE GREAT PLAINS

to the far West, yet its influence was strong, and, in later years, when the time was ripe, the observations of Lewis and Clark were of the utmost value. In the interim the great wilderness remained comparatively unknown, roamed over by Indian and fur-trader; the tawny Missouri was the natural highway of those few adventurous spirits who dared to penetrate that region of savagery.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE EXPLORATIONS OF PIKE AND LONG

#### The Objects of Pike's Expedition

**A**T ABOUT the same time that Lewis and Clark, with their heroic companions, were struggling across the mountains in search of the Pacific, the Government was preparing to send explorers endeavoring to open up the Southwest. This second expedition was commanded by Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike, who a few years later lost his life in battle against the English in Canada. At the time of his assignment to this duty he had just returned from a successful exploration of the Mississippi to its head-waters. April 30, 1806, he returned to St. Louis from this trip, and in July departed westward on his long journey across the prairies. His party consisted of twenty-three soldiers, and he was required to escort to their homes a number of Osage and Pawnee chiefs who had been visiting in Washington. The special avowed object of his trip was to reach the sources of the Arkansas River, and explore the mountains of what is now Colorado.

#### From St. Louis to Kansas and Nebraska

Pike travelled by boat up the Missouri and Osage Rivers until the village of the Osage Indians was reached. At this point the boats



## THE GREAT PLAINS

were abandoned, and the party moved forward across the prairies of Kansas and Nebraska to the home of the Pawnees. Here evidence was discovered that the Spaniards at Santa Fe had in some way learned of the Americans' projected exploration westward, and had already taken steps to block the path. How really serious this opposition was to prove was not fully revealed until later, but at this time Pike learned that an armed body of Spaniards had just visited the Pawnees, held council with them, and left behind a present of flags. Just what alliance had been entered into it was impossible to learn, yet the Pawnee chief made every effort in his power, short of actual force, to keep the Americans from proceeding, claiming that he had promised the Spaniards to intercept them. Pike, however, promptly lowered the flag of Spain, hoisted his own in its place, and marched resolutely forward.

### Discovery of Pike's Peak

The advance of the little body of intrepid explorers was directly across the open prairie, and they occasionally passed the deserted camping-spots of the Spanish troops. The notable sights mentioned day by day were buffalo, wild horses, and prairie dogs. Changing their direction more toward the south, yet finding little to guide them in the unvaried landscape, they finally attained the northern bank of the Arkansas River, not far from the present town of Great Bend. Here the party was divided, a number of the men being despatched



LIEUTENANT ZEBULON PIKE  
THE FAMOUS EXPLORER OF THE SOUTHWEST

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## EXPLORATIONS OF PIKE AND LONG

down the river for exploration. Pike, with fifteen followers pushed up the stream to the plains of Colorado, and finally made camp near the site of Pueblo. A little before this, November 15, while near the mouth of the Purgatory River, the leader discovered the peak to which has been given his name and which has become his monument. Of this first view he wrote:

"I thought I could distinguish a mountain to our right which appeared like a small blue cloud; viewed it with the spy-glass and was still more confirmed in my conjecture; . . . in half an hour they [the mountains] appeared in full view before us. When our small party arrived on the hill they with one accord gave three cheers to the Mexican Mountains."

His "blue cloud" has ever since been known as Pike's Peak.

### Pike Mistakes the Arkansas for the Red River

On November 24 Pike took a few men with him, and set forth from camp with the intention of climbing the Peak. He made the mistake, very common in that atmosphere, of believing it only a short distance away. In reality the distance to its base was a hundred miles. After travelling far, and climbing lower ridges, the great peak still towered before them in the far distance. They pushed on, however, for three days, when deepening snow, together with thin clothing and a scarcity of food, compelled a retreat. A little later the entire company began an ascent of the Arkansas, reaching probably the present site of Cañon City. Here they turned aside,

## THE GREAT PLAINS

following the course of Oil Creek to South Park, and passed along the South Platte until they again found themselves upon the banks of the Arkansas. Believing this to be Red River, the source of which he had been particularly ordered to discover, Pike defied the bitter cold of a mountain winter and advanced up the stream until he reached its beginnings near Leadville. Returning, and arriving at his former camp at Cañon City, he was disappointed to discover that instead of the Red River he was still upon the Arkansas.

### Caught on Spanish Territory

Determined that he would yet succeed, he started again January 14, 1807, braving a bitter winter storm. With much difficulty and suffering the little party toiled forward up Grape Creek and along Wet Mountain Valley. All his men were frost-bitten, and several crippled for life. Yet they pressed resolutely on, clambering across the Sangre de Cristo Range, and finally descending into the San Luis Valley. This brought them to the Rio Grande, well within Mexican territory, but Pike, believing the stream to be the Red River, began its descent along the west bank. Reaching the entrance of the Rio Conejos on January 31, he made camp, and began the erection of a stockade. Although doubtless ignorant of the fact, he was now scarcely eighty miles from the more northern Mexican settlement, and could not hope to remain for long undiscovered by Spanish scouting parties.

## EXPLORATIONS OF PIKE AND LONG

Much speculation has been indulged in by historical writers regarding this movement into Mexican territory — the question being whether or not it was the result of deliberate purpose, or merely accident. General Wilkinson was at that time deeply implicated in the plot engineered by Aaron Burr to found a new empire in the Southwest. Pike had been despatched on this exploring expedition by Wilkinson; he was carrying out the latter's orders, but we do not know just what those orders were. McMaster is inclined to think that this invasion by American soldiers was a deliberate part of the Wilkinson plot; but Pike himself emphatically denied any such motive, and it would seem far more probable that by losing his way he became an innocent participant in a political game regarding which he knew nothing.

Be that as it may, the result was inevitable. He had been at this camping-place less than a month when a considerable Spanish force appeared. No attempt at resistance was made, owing probably to the exceedingly polite manner in which the commandant extended an invitation to the lost Americans to visit the Governor at Santa Fe. However pleasantly the truth was thus concealed under the guise of fair words, the little party of explorers were no less prisoners, as they discovered upon arrival at the capital. They were deprived of their arms, and after severe questioning the Governor despatched the confiding Captain under guard to the commandant-general at Chihuahua, where his pa-

## THE GREAT PLAINS

pers were taken from him. Finally, after many journeys here and there, the entire party were escorted northward across Texas, and safely delivered to their countrymen at Natchitoches, Louisiana, on July 1, 1807.

### The Object of Long's Journey

Twelve years later the Government despatched another expedition into these Western wilds. The object was an exploration of the Yellowstone; but, through various causes, this was abandoned, and the party contented itself with an almost aimless wandering across the Great Plains. While little was discovered, the publicity given to the report made had considerable effect upon Western settlement. The organization was at first both military and scientific, the troops being under command of Colonel Henry Atkinson, and the other department controlled by Major Stephen H. Long. The journey up the Missouri was performed on the "Western Engineer," probably the first stern-wheel steamboat ever built, and which had just been launched at Pittsburg. This marine wonder was seventy-five feet long, thirteen feet beam, and drew nineteen inches of water, and, although very slow, proved quite successful. Leaving St. Louis June 9, 1819, the "Western Engineer" succeeded in arriving at what is now Council Bluffs the seventeenth of September. Here winter camp was made, and the troops suffered severely from scurvy. Over three hundred were attacked, of whom a third died.

## EXPLORATIONS OF PIKE AND LONG

The scientists in camp a short distance away did not suffer; they passed a pleasant winter, visiting much at the adjacent fort of the Missouri Fur Company, where were two women, probably the first to ascend the Missouri so far. One was the wife of the Commandant, Manuel Lisa; the name of the other is unknown. When Spring came, for reasons not even yet clearly understood the military portion of the proposed expedition was abandoned; the troops were ordered East, but Major Long and his scientists were despatched westward into the Plains, his orders being to go "to the source of the River Platte, and thence by way of the Arkansas and Red Rivers to the Mississippi." The party thus sent into the very heart of the Indian country was small and poorly equipped. Besides Major Long it consisted of Captain John R. Bell, Lieutenant W. H. Swift, Thomas Say, Edwin James, T. R. Peale, Samuel Seymour, H. Dougherty, D. Adams, three *engagés*, one corporal, and six privates. So thoroughly was this band despised by the savages that on several occasions their chiefs contemptuously refused to meet them in council.

### The Canadian River Mistaken for the Red River.

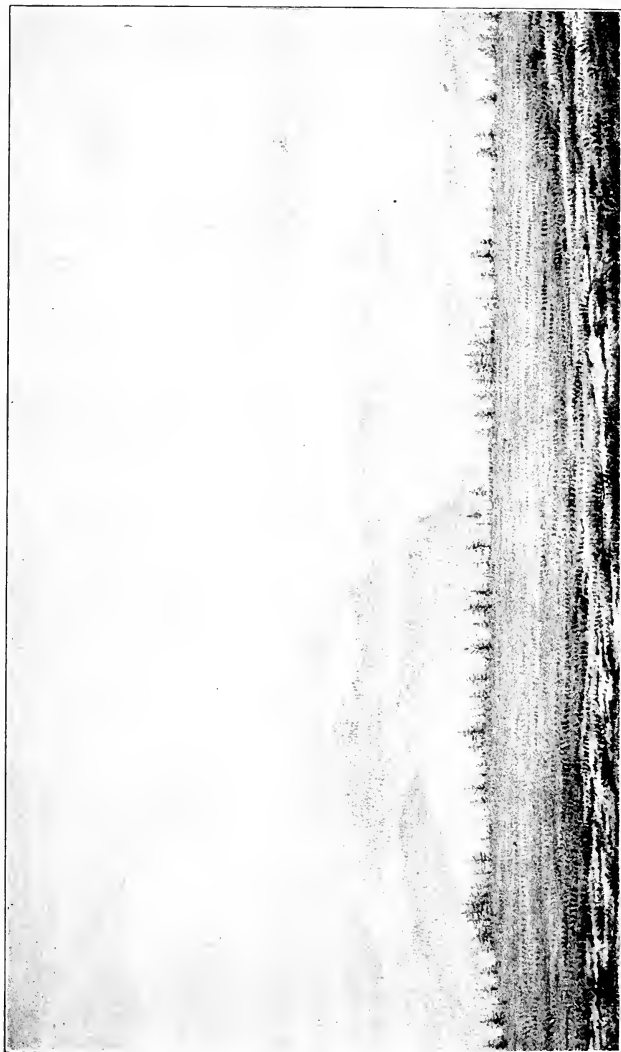
Leaving camp on the Missouri June 6, the little company proceeded, by way of the Pawnee villages on the Loup, up the sandy shores of the Platte as far as the present site of Grand Island. Here they crossed the stream, and without incident continued on to the Forks, and ascended the South Fork. The



## THE GREAT PLAINS

thirtieth of June they came in sight of the mountains, the peak first seen since bearing the name of Long. Very little effort was made to follow the stream to its source, mountain-climbing being exceedingly hard work, and the camp established on the present site of Denver proving a pleasant place of rest. July 9, however, this camp was deserted, and the party moved southward, and halted on the banks of Fountain Creek. Starting from here, Dr. James, with two men, succeeded in ascending Pike's Peak to its summit, and ascertained its altitude. Resuming their march on the sixteenth, they arrived at the Arkansas near the mouth of Turkey Creek. Here, after a few short exploring expeditions had been attempted, resulting in no discoveries of importance, the company separated, one section under Captain Bell descending the Arkansas, while the other sought the Red River. This separation occurred July 24, 1820.

The travels of both parties proved uneventful, that down the Arkansas terminating at Fort Smith, September 9. Major Long's party took a course slightly east of south, crossing Purgatory Creek and several of the sources of the Cimarron, until they arrived at what they believed to be a tributary of the Red River. This they followed to the main stream, which was descended to its mouth, when the discovery was made that instead of the Red they had been upon the Canadian River. The party suffered greatly from excessive heat and lack of food, but had no adventures, and learned little of



PIKE'S PEAK

*From an early drawing*



## EXPLORATIONS OF PIKE AND LONG

the country which could not have been discovered by interviewing those traders and trappers who already ranged the region. They arrived at Fort Smith only four days later than Captain Bell. This expedition practically completed all Government effort at exploration for several years.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FUR-TRADERS

#### Trappers and Traders the True Pathfinders

**W**HILE the Government was virtually neglecting this Western country of the Plains, private enterprise had been slowly prying open its secrets, and individuals were finding their uncertain way along its water-courses, or across its sun-browned prairie. The fur trade was the powerful magnet which thus early drew westward hardy adventurers by the score. Very few of the names of those who thus first trod the Plains have been preserved even upon the records of the great fur companies. They were generally obscure, illiterate men, possessing little except their rifles and traps, living for long years in the depths of the wilderness, only occasionally appearing amid the haunts of pioneer civilization with their packs of furs. Sometimes they travelled in independent parties for protection against Indian treachery; some were free trappers, others were enrolled upon the lists of the organized fur companies and worked under orders. In either case they necessarily led hard, wild lives, continually filled with adventure and personal peril. These men, roughly clothed, living on wild game, their safety constantly menaced, were the true Western pathfinders, digging continually deeper year by year into the vast wilderness, and from their ranks came

## THE FUR-TRADERS

those competent guides who were later to lead organized expeditions to the Western Ocean. During the forty years following the purchase of Louisiana by the United States the people of the East possessed hardly the slightest conception of its immense value. The one considerable commercial attraction it offered during this period was its wealth of furs, and during nearly half a century this was its sole business of importance.

In the language of Chittenden, introducing his history of the American fur trade:

"The nature of this business determined the character of the early white population. It was the roving trader and the solitary white trapper who first sought out these inhospitable wilds, traced the streams to their sources, scaled the mountain passes, and explored a boundless expanse of territory where the foot of the white man had never trodden before. The far West became a field of romantic adventure, and developed a class of men who loved the wandering career of the native inhabitant rather than the toilsome lot of the industrious colonist. The type of life thus developed, though essentially evanescent, and not representing any profound national movement, was a distinct and necessary phase in the growth of this new country. Abounding in incidents picturesque and heroic, its annals inspire an interest akin to that which belongs to the age of knight-errantry. For the free hunter of the far West was, in his rough way, a good deal of a knight-errant. Caparisoned in the wild attire of the Indian, and armed *cap-à-pie* for instant combat, he roamed far and wide over deserts and mountains, gathering the scattered wealth of those regions, slaying ferocious beasts and savage men, and leading a life in which every footstep was beset with enemies, and every movement pregnant of peril. The great proportion of those intrepid spirits who laid down their lives in that far country is impressive proof of the jeopardy of their existence. All in all, the period of this adventurous

## THE GREAT PLAINS

business may justly be considered the romantic era of the history of the West."

So valuable was this preliminary work in exploration that the able historian of the movement seems fully justified in his statement, that these often unknown men were the true pathfinders, and not those official explorers who came later, yet have been accorded the proud title. Nothing in Western geography was ever discovered by Government expeditions after 1840. It was every mile of it known previously to trader and trapper. Brigham Young was led to the valley of Great Salt Lake by information furnished by these men; in the war with Mexico the military forces were guided by those who knew every trail and mountain pass; they were veterans of the fur trade who pointed Frémont to the Pacific; and when the rush of emigration finally set in toward Oregon and California, the very earliest of those travellers found already made for them a highway across the continent.

### Some Noteworthy Free Trappers

At how early a date adventurous free trappers had invaded the Great Plains it is impossible to state. French-Canadians undoubtedly drifted down from the north, through the country of the Sioux, well back in the eighteenth century, possibly even penetrating as far as the Arkansas, where they came in contact with the Spanish outposts. As early as 1800 American hunters had advanced up the Missouri as far as the villages of the Mandans, and had

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trapped upon the waters of the Platte. In 1804 we know that two Illinois men, Hancock and Dickson, were trapping beaver on the Yellowstone, and there must have been scattered here and there others whose names have not been preserved. In 1807 John Colter, a member of Lewis and Clark's party, discharged on the Missouri, immediately turned back into the wilderness, where he remained for years, making important discoveries, including that region now known as Yellowstone Park. Potts, another Lewis and Clark man, accompanied him until killed by Indians. The full story of these individual wanderers over plain and mountain can never be written. Very few of the names, or the adventures met with, have been preserved, and the most of the men perished alone in the wilderness.

### Organized Fur-Traders Opposed by the Indians

Among organized fur-traders the earliest name of any prominence is that of Manuel Lisa, of St. Louis. With him were associated Pierre Menard and William Morrison, of Kaskaskia. As early as 1807 these men began operations on the Plains, gradually advancing into the mountains, establishing trading-posts along the Missouri, and as far away as the mouth of the Big Horn. These men were compelled to fight the Indians as well as conduct trade with them, and their yearly reports were as full of adventure as of business. Of all the Plains tribes the Aricaras of South Dakota caused the most trouble, although the Sioux were also fre-



## THE GREAT PLAINS

quently found hostile. In the mountains the Blackfeet were almost continually upon the war-path.

### Adventures of Ezekiel Williams

The adventures of a party under Ezekiel Williams occurred also as early as 1807. He was a well-known frontiersman, who had been employed by the Government to restore to his own people a Mandan chief who had accompanied Lewis and Clark to Washington after a military expedition had failed. Twenty men started with him. Having safely performed this assigned duty, Williams and his party started west into the mountains on a trapping trip, dividing into two detachments on arriving at the mouth of the Yellowstone. The Indians becoming troublesome, Williams with eight or ten of the men moved south along the base of the mountains until they reached the Arkansas. Here another separation took place, four going to Santa Fe, while Williams with five men, two of them Frenchmen, struck out into the mountains. Here, while trapping, three were killed, and Williams, with Chaplain and Parteau, sought protection among the Arapahoes on the South Platte. They passed a miserable winter, but in the spring Williams got away, and floated down the Arkansas in a canoe for over four hundred miles. He was captured by Kansas Indians, and robbed of his furs, but finally reached safety in Missouri in September. The next May he conducted a party back to the Arapahoe village in

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search of his companions, only to learn they had probably been killed.

### Explorations by Employees of the Fur Companies

The great fur companies had but little to do with the Plains except to traverse them in their journeys back and forth between the market at St. Louis and the mountains. In the earlier days there was some trapping of beaver along the prairie streams, but this was usually done independently. In this work nearly every water-course between the Missouri and the Rockies had been explored by daring adventurers, oftentimes traversing the wilderness alone. Yet the main supply of furs was sought in the mountains, and it was to these the great fur companies despatched their men, generally by boats up the Missouri, although occasionally parties struck directly across the intervening Plain, usually following the valley of the Platte. Of the two methods it would almost seem as though that by water was the more difficult. Against a swift current heavily laden keel-boats were slowly hauled, or "cordelled," twenty men along the shore pulling the clumsy barge by means of a line fastened high enough to be out of the way of brushwood. Where the water was shallow the voyageurs poled single file, facing the stern, and pushing with all their power. In deeper water oars were utilized, but in any case it was slow, hard work, involving months of unremitting labor.

The same year in which Lisa first organized

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the Missouri Fur Company, Mr. Astor commenced operations on the Pacific Coast, and at once there began open war between these two companies for the control of the fur trade. The Northwestern Fur Company also became involved in the hostilities. Regarding the occurrences in the far Northwest we have now nothing to do, except that they were more or less connected with the movement of expeditions across the Plains. One of the most important of these was that led by William P. Hunt for the Pacific Fur Company, which left St. Louis in the Spring of 1812. He had over sixty men in his company, and much toil and suffering were encountered. Some of the way it became a race between his party and representatives of the Missouri Fur Company. Hunt's party ascended the Missouri as far as the mouth of the Big Cheyenne. Here they left their boats and followed the general course of that stream to the base of the Black Hills; then they travelled westward to the valley of the North Platte. They were almost a year in reaching the Pacific, their circuitous route measuring nearly thirty-five hundred miles.

A year later a party consisting of Robert Stuart, McLellan, Crooks, and two Frenchmen, travelled east from Astoria. On the way, probably in southern Wyoming, they met a trapper named Miller, who had just escaped from the Arapahoes. These same Indians succeeded in running off their horses, and they were compelled to perform the remainder of their journey to the Missouri on foot.

## THE FUR-TRADERS

Their sufferings in the mountains had been intense, but after reaching the Plains they had little trouble. They followed the Platte through its entire course, being the first party on record to do so.

### The Ashley Expedition

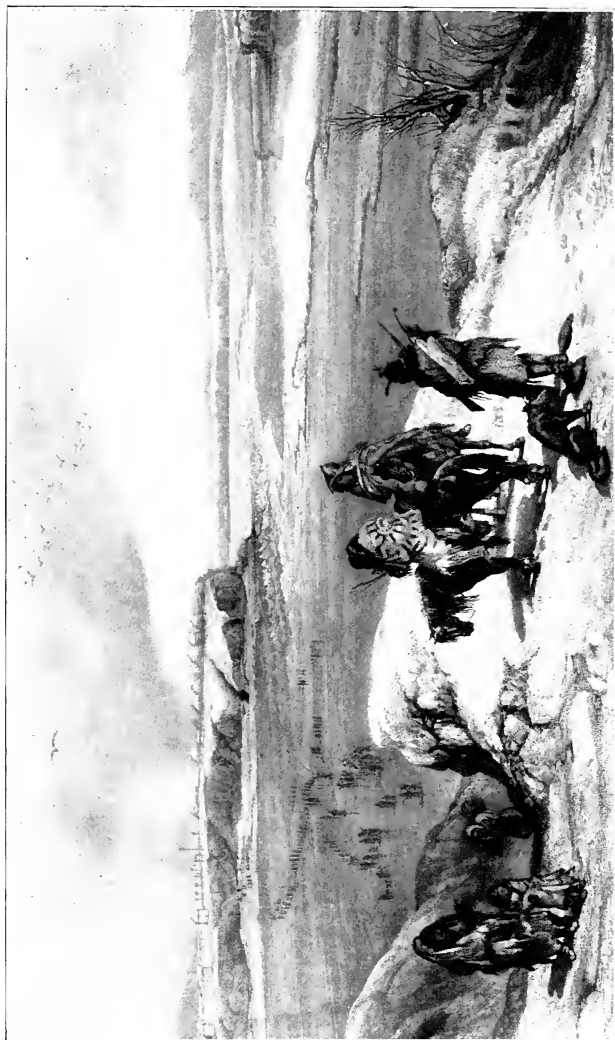
In 1822 William H. Ashley comes into prominence, being connected with the North American Fur Company. In that year he helped Alexander Henry to erect a trading-fort on the Yellowstone, and a year later he started up the Missouri with twenty-eight men, bound for that post. On the way they were attacked by Aricaras and driven back, having fourteen killed and ten wounded. Undaunted by this, Ashley enlisted three hundred followers, and in 1824 struck out across the Plains, following the Platte to the South Pass, and exploring the Sweetwater. He pushed through the mountains to Utah Lake, built a fort there, and two years later sold out his interest to several of his men, Jedediah S. Smith, William L. Sublette, and David E. Jackson. These were well-known names among early trappers and traders, Smith having reached California, by the way of Utah and Nevada, as early as 1826. In the service of both Ashley and this newly formed company, was James P. Beckwourth, long famous throughout the West. He claimed to have been in the mountains since 1817, and to have been the first to explore the South Platte. To Smith, Sublette, and Jackson belongs the distinction of taking the first wagons

## THE GREAT PLAINS

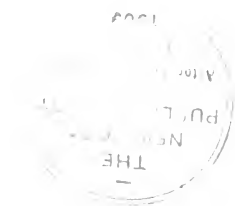
across the Plains and into the mountains. Ten wagons, each drawn by five mules, were driven the entire distance from St. Louis to Wind River. Each wagon carried eighteen hundred pounds, and they travelled from fifteen to twenty-five miles a day. A year later the same company brought out fourteen wagons, and others soon discovered this to be the easier method of crossing the Great Plains with supplies. The favorite route was northwest to Grand Island, and then the valley of the Platte. A few years later this became the well-travelled route to Oregon.

The revived Missouri Fur Company was at about this date, under the leadership of Lisa, Pilcher, Hempstead, and Perkins, operating in the country around the South Pass, although the principal territory covered by its trappers was among the Sioux, Aricaras, and other Missouri River tribes. By 1830 the various organized companies must have had a regiment of men on the Plains and in the mountains. Of these as individuals very little is known. As Herbert Bancroft writes: "It would be gratifying to be able to give a list of all the hunters and trappers previous to the period of emigration; but these men had no individual importance in the eyes of their leaders, who recruited their rapidly thinning ranks yearly, with little attention to the personality of the victims of hardship, accident, vice, or Indian hostility."

Those hunters were regarded by the fur companies as mere tools by which they could acquire



FORT CLARK, ON THE MISSOURI RIVER



## THE FUR-TRADERS

the peltry to be found in unsettled districts; and when by disease or death they became no longer serviceable, they were cast aside. In many cases their bodies were left unburied on the prairie. The names of a few of the more prominent have been preserved. Among them are Blackwell, La Jeunesse, Robert Campbell, Kit Carson, Newell, Meck, Ebberts, Gervais, Craig, Vanderberg, Gale, Ward, Wade, Parmalee, Robinson, Larison, Guthrie, Claymore, Legarde, Maloney, Harris, Matthieu, Boudreau, Bissonette, Adams, Sabille, Galpin."

### Captain Bonneville's Expedition up the Platte

It was in 1832 that Captain E. L. Bonneville, an army officer on leave, led a party of one hundred and ten frontiersmen across the Plains to the Rockies. His purpose was profit and adventure, and his officers Walker and Serre. They followed the route up the Platte Valley with a caravan of twenty wagons, the journey being particularly notable because oxen were used, these being the first "bull-teams" on the northern Plains. The company remained in the mountain country for over three years. Nathaniel J. Wyeth led a party of adventurers over about the same route in 1832.

The requirements of the fur trade, carried on as it was in the midst of hostile savages, and at a great distance from civilization, led to the early establishment at convenient points for transportation, of posts or forts. These were usually controlled by the great fur companies, yet were occasionally



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erected by individuals. In appearance they differed little, except in size, and the material used in construction. Where possible forest trees were utilized for buildings and stockade, although on the open prairie earth was occasionally made to serve these purposes, and in the far south adobe prevailed. In the later days of the trade the majority of these forts were in the mountains; yet near enough to the western edge of the Plains to deal with the Plains Indians, but earlier one can trace the slow advance of the trapper into the wilderness by the posts thus built along his way. Between 1807 and 1843 over one hundred and forty of these posts were erected throughout the Western country.

### French Forts in the Valley of the Missouri

Fort Orleans, built by the French under M. Bourgemont, was the first of the Missouri River posts, dating back to 1772, and stood upon an island five miles below the mouth of the Grand River. There is a tradition that it was once attacked by savages, and all the inmates massacred. At least three posts were a little later established in the Osage Valley, but acquired no special importance. Fort Osage, or Fort Clark, stood near the site of Sibley, Missouri, below the mouth of the Kansas. It later became a Government fort, and was garrisoned until 1827. Francis G. Chouteau, a famous trader, built two posts in the country of the Kansas Indians. The first was destroyed by flood in 1826, but the second, about ten miles

## THE FUR-TRADERS

up the Kansas River, was maintained for many years. An old French fort, the history of which is unknown, stood on the Kansas shore opposite the upper end of Kickapoo Island, well back among the bluffs. It was in ruins as early as 1819. A post, erected by Joseph Robidoux, and known as Blacksnake Hills, stood on the present site of St. Joseph, Missouri. At Council Bluffs a number of posts were built, but their names have been forgotten. This was a famous trading-point; but the Council Bluffs of those earlier years was twenty-five miles above the modern city of that name, and on the opposite side of the river, being about where the little town of Calhoun now stands. In the fifty years following the Lewis and Clark Expedition not less than twenty trading-forts were erected between this point and the mouth of the Platte. Probably the oldest of these was Bellevue, which is believed to have been established in 1805. The most important, however, was Fort Lisa, founded in 1812, and situated six miles below old Council Bluffs.

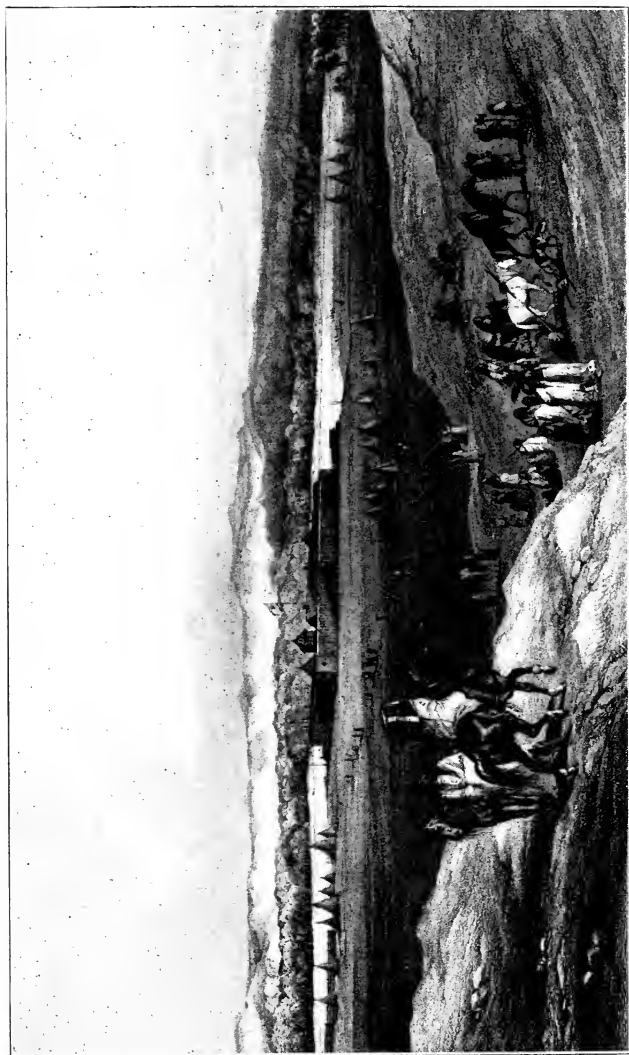
Similar posts were found opposite the modern town of Onawa, Iowa; near the mouth of the Big Sioux, and just below the mouth of the Vermilion. Halfway between the Vermilion and the James stood another, while Ponca Post was beside the mouth of the Niobrara. Trudeau's House, sometimes called Pawnee House, was occupied for trade as early as 1796. It was on the left bank, above and nearly opposite old Fort Randall. In the

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neighborhood of Chamberlain, South Dakota, were a number of forts, operated by different fur companies as early as 1810. Among them were Recovery, Brasseaux, Lookout, Kiowa, and Defiance. Of these Kiowa, established in 1822, was the largest and commercially the most important. It was built of logs, and inclosed with a stockade of cottonwood twenty feet high. Lozzell's Post, about thirty-five miles below Fort Pierre, was probably the first American trading-fort built in the Sioux country, and was occupied as early as 1803. It was of logs, and was seventy feet square, with bastions.

### The Early Trading-Posts

The mouth of what is now called Bad River, formerly the Little Missouri, was prolific of trading-posts. This was the nearest point on the Missouri River to the Black Hills and the upper Platte Valley. When the first fort was established is unknown, but the more famous in the early days were Forts Tecumseh and Pierre. The latter was quite extensive, containing about two and a half acres of land. Scattered throughout the Sioux country numerous small posts were built. There were three in the valley of the James, besides one at the forks and one at the mouth of the Cheyenne, one at the Aricara villages, and others on Cherry, White, and Niobrara Rivers. These, however, were not important or permanent structures. Near the Mandans were several forts, the earliest of which was built by Lewis and Clark in 1804, while but little later



FORT UNION, ON THE MISSOURI RIVER



## THE FUR-TRADERS

Manuel Lisa occupied the ground. His post later became known as Fort Vanderburgh. Beyond this point we need not go up the Missouri except to mention the largest and most important of all the trading-forts, Fort Union<sup>1</sup> at the mouth of the Yellowstone. Probably this was first built in October, 1828. In size it was two hundred and forty by two hundred and twenty feet, surrounded by a palisade a foot thick and twenty feet high. The bastions were of stone, surmounted by pyramidal roofs, the walls pierced for defence. A very large number of men were employed here, and Indians journeyed from great distances to trade.

### Forts along the Eastern Base of the Rockies.

Leaving this northern mountain country and passing southward, we will note briefly those trading posts established along the eastern base of the Rockies, whose dealings were principally with the Indians of the Plains. The Portuguese Houses, near the junction of the North and South Forks of the Powder River, were occupied at a very early date, and were in ruins in 1859. They were erected by a trader named Antonio Mateo. Bridger averred that at one time this post successfully resisted a siege of forty days by the Sioux. Fort William, named for William L. Sublette, stood at the junction of the North Platte and Laramie Rivers. It was built in 1834, and, after an interesting history

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<sup>1</sup> "Audubon and His Journals," Vol. II, p. 180, gives a detailed description of this remarkable wilderness fortification.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

as a trading-post, was sold to the Government, and rechristened Fort Laramie. Fort Platte was an unimportant post, erected about 1840, on the right bank of that stream. La Bonti was a temporary trading-house, occupied in 1841, at the mouth of La Bonti Creek. In the valley of the South Platte, about thirty miles below the present site of Denver, were a number of trading establishments whose names and histories have not been preserved. Fort Lupton, also known as Lancaster, stood on the right bank of the South Platte, two miles above the mouth of the Saint Vrain. It was built of adobe. Fort Saint Vrain was at the mouth of that tributary, and was prominent about 1841, when in charge of Marcellus Saint Vrain. Two other posts were in this neighborhood, but their names are not of record.

### Trading-Posts in the Valley of the Arkansas

The valley of the Arkansas was long occupied by the fur-traders; but as these were largely independent operators, their posts were mostly of a temporary character. The earliest of them dates back to 1763, and was situated close up to the foot of the mountains, but the name of the daring adventurer is unknown. In 1806 Lieutenant Pike built a redoubt just above the mouth of Fountain Creek, and it is believed that Chouteau and De Munn occupied a house in the same neighborhood in 1815-1817. In 1821 Jacob Fowler erected a log structure on the present site of Pueblo, but his stay there was brief. Gant and Blackwell, who were successful traders

## THE FUR-TRADERS

with the Arapahoes, had a post six miles above Fountain Creek in 1832, and ten years later, at the mouth of that same stream, either James Beckwourth or George Simpson built a fort which became known as the Pueblo. In 1843 there were two posts, names unknown, about five miles above Bent's Fort, inhabited by French and Mexicans. Their principal business seems to have been smuggling across the Mexican-American line. The lower Arkansas had no post of importance, and was not greatly frequented by trappers. That known as Glenn's is alone worthy of mention, and stood about a mile above the mouth of the Verdigris, not far from the later site of Fort Gibson. It was probably abandoned as early as 1821.

The one important trading-post of the southern Plains was Bent's Fort, or Fort Williams. This stood on the north bank of the Arkansas about half-way between the present towns of La Junta and Las Animas, Colorado. It was erected by three Bent brothers, all famous as Western frontiersmen, in 1829. It became noted in both the fur and Santa Fe trades, a great rendezvous for trappers, and a stopping-place for all the wanderers of the Plains. At times hundreds of men, women, and children were gathered in and about its walls, and many were the stirring incidents of its romantic history. It was one hundred and fifty by one hundred feet in size, the longer sides running north and south. The walls were of adobe, six feet thick at the base, and seventeen high. The single entrance was upon the



## THE GREAT PLAINS

east. In 1839 this fort had in its employ nearly a hundred men. Its trade was with the Arapahoes, Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Comanches. Rather than sell to the Government at a price less than he believed it worth, Colonel William Bent deliberately destroyed the buildings in 1852. To-day the ruins are yet visible.

## CHAPTER VIII

### INCIDENTS DURING THE FUR TRADE

#### Sufferings of the Trappers

**T**HE history of the fur trade is filled with stories of adventure, daring, and savage warfare. What the hardy trappers suffered, isolated in the wilderness, battling constantly against wild beasts and wild men, can never be known. The majority died in the silence of remote regions, their very names long since forgotten, the heroism of their last fight untold. The records of the great fur companies alone contain brief mention of such incidents as appeared to them worthy of being written down. These generally occurred among the fastnesses of the great mountains, where the trappers made rendezvous and spent the larger part of their lives. The disastrous battle at Pierre's Hole, the heroic exploration of Utah, and the first advance to California, are all full of dramatic incident; but the occurrences took place too far to the westward for the scope of this present work. After the first years of exploration, and some beaver trapping along the streams, the Great Plains were used merely as a crossing from the region of civilization to the far more profitable mountain region beyond. Up the Missouri by boat, or along the valley of the Platte on foot, the hunters passed, alone or in

## THE GREAT PLAINS

companies, their destination those great ranges beyond. No doubt much of hardship, of adventure, of Indian-fighting, marked those long prairie miles, but not of sufficient interest to be recorded in the prosaic journals of the fur companies.

### The Escape of Hugh Glass

The miraculous escape of Hugh Glass well pictures the endurance and suffering of these men. Glass was connected with Andrew Henry's party in the expedition to the Yellowstone. While he was out hunting somewhere along the Grand River, a grizzly bear dashed out of a thicket, threw him to the earth, tore out a mouthful of his flesh, and turning, gave it to her cubs. Glass sought to escape, but instantly she was again upon him. Seizing him by the shoulder she inflicted dangerous wounds on hands and arms. At this moment some of his companions arrived and killed the bear. Although still alive, Glass was so terribly mangled that it was not believed he could possibly survive. They were in hostile Indian country, and it was necessary the party should proceed without delay. Finally, Major Henry, by offering a reward, induced two of the men to remain with Glass, while the others pressed forward. One of the two was named Fitzgerald, and the other, a mere boy, may have been James Bridger, later a famous borderer. They remained with the wounded hunter five days. Then, despairing of his recovery, yet seeing no prospect of immediate death, they left him to his fate, taking

## INCIDENTS DURING THE FUR TRADE

with them his rifle and all accoutrements. Reaching the main party they reported him dead.

But Glass was not dead. Reviving, he crawled to a spring. Close beside it he found wild cherries and buffalo berries on which he lived, slowly recovering his strength, until at last he ventured to strike out on his long and lonely journey. His objective point was Fort Kiowa, on the Missouri River, a hundred miles away. He started with hardly strength enough to drag one limb after the other, with no provisions or means of securing any, and in a hostile country where he would be the helpless victim of any straying savage. But love of life, and a growing desire for revenge on those who had deserted him, urged him to the effort. Fortune seemed with him. He came to where wolves were harrying a buffalo calf. He let them kill it, and then, frightening them away, appropriated the meat, eating as best he could without either knife or fire. Bearing all he could with him, he pushed resolutely forward, and, after great distress and hardship, attained Fort Kiowa.

Before his wounds healed, Glass was again in the field, starting east with a party of trappers bound down the Missouri. When nearing the Mandan villages he decided to walk across where the river made a bend. Here luck was with him, as the boats were attacked by Aricara Indians, and all those on board killed. Glass, too feeble to fight, had a narrow escape, and was taken by friendly Mandans to Tilton's Fort. His one purpose at this

## THE GREAT PLAINS

time was vengeance on those two who had deserted him in the mountains. Thus inspired, he left Tilton's the same night, plunged into the wilderness, travelled alone for thirty-eight days through hostile Indian country, and at last reached Henry's Fort, at the mouth of the Big Horn. Here he discovered that the men he sought had gone east. Still seeking them, he at once accepted an opportunity to carry a despatch to Fort Atkinson.

### Adventures of Four Trappers

Four men started with him, and they left the Big Horn, February 28, 1824. They went on foot, first into the valley of the Powder, and then across the divide into the valley of the Platte. Here they made skin boats, and floated down the stream until they got beyond the foot-hills onto the open prairie. Suddenly they ran into a band of Aricaras, with whom they attempted to hold council. The savages made a treacherous attack, and killed two of the men; but, almost by a miracle, Glass managed to get away, although he lost all his equipment excepting a knife and a flint. He struck out again alone for the nearest post, Fort Kiowa. It was at a season when buffalo calves were young, so he had plenty of meat, and his flint gave him fire. In fifteen days' travel he made the fort, and, at the very first opportunity went down the river again. This time he reached Fort Atkinson in safety, arriving there in June, 1824. Apparently his desire for revenge had ceased, as he made no further effort to

## INCIDENTS DURING THE FUR TRADE

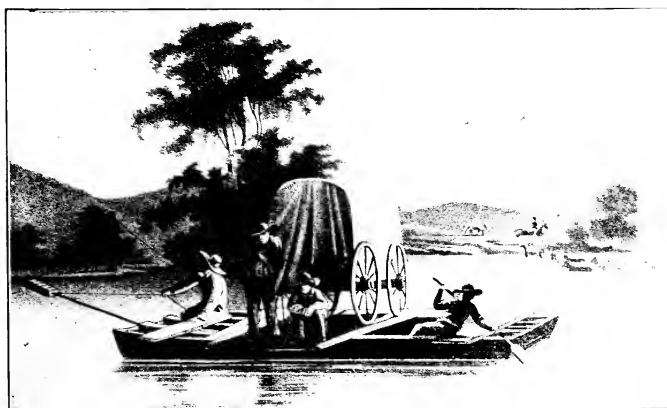
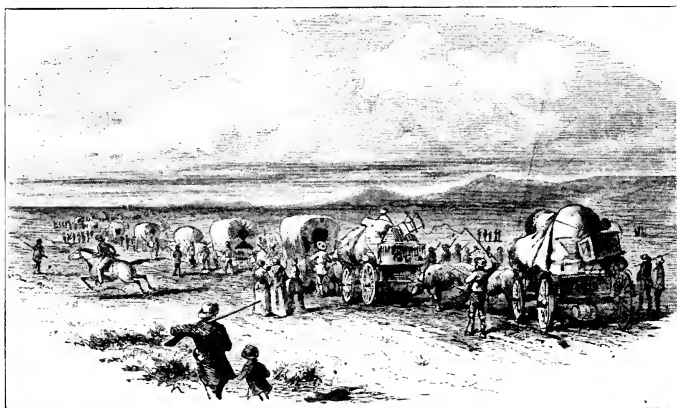
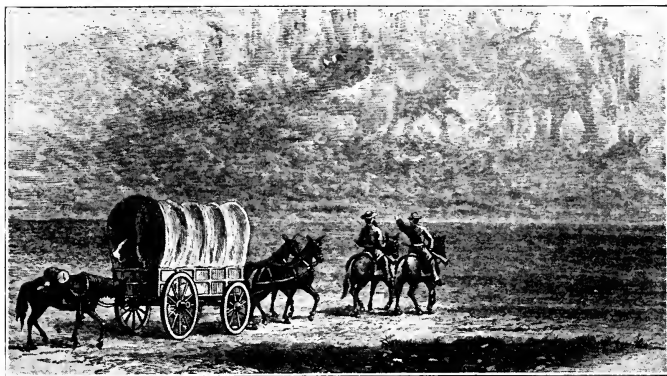
discover those who had deserted him. Glass was finally killed by Indians on the Yellowstone in 1832.

Another pathetic incident of the wilderness is illustrative of the life led by these men. Six hundred and sixteen miles from Independence, Missouri, on what was later the Old Oregon Trail, was a landmark known as Scott's Bluffs. The name arose from one of the most melancholy happenings in the history of the fur trade. A party of trappers were descending the Platte in canoes, when their boats were upset in some rapids, and all their supplies and powder lost. Their plight was desperate, and rendered more so by the serious illness of one of their number, named Scott. While scarcely knowing what to do they came upon a fresh trail of a party of white men, leading down the river. Anxious to overtake this party, and Scott not being able to move, they deliberately deserted him to his fate, reporting later that he had died. A year after, the man's skeleton was discovered beside these bluffs, proving that the wretched sufferer had actually crawled more than forty miles before he finally surrendered to the inevitable, and sank down in merciful death.

The death of Jedediah S. Smith, whose remarkable adventures while exploring a route to California have already been mentioned, was one of the tragedies of the Plains. Smith was in many respects a remarkable man, deeply religious, of undaunted courage, and untiring energy. He enlisted in the fur

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trade when a mere boy, and, at seventeen, won distinction among these hardy men in battle with the Aricaras. After Ashley's retreat Smith carried despatches to Henry's Fort on the Yellowstone, a mission of great peril. The remainder of his life was passed in the wilderness, where he became a recognized leader. In 1831 Smith, in connection with his old fur partners, Jackson and Sublette, decided to engage in the Santa Fe trade. In Missouri they secured an outfit with twenty wagons and eighty men, and started out through Kansas. Being veterans of the Plains they felt no doubt of getting through safely, and everything went well as far as the ford of the Arkansas. Here they entered upon the desert waste lying between that river and the Cimarron. No one in the party had been over the route before, and they found no trail, no guiding landmark. Mirages deceived them and led them astray, and the caravan wandered for two days without water, their condition becoming desperate. Smith determined to ride ahead and find a way for the others. Following a buffalo trail he came upon the Cimarron, but found the bed of the stream dry. Knowing the nature of such rivers, he scooped out a hole in the bottom, which slowly filled with water. Stooping down to drink, never dreaming of danger, he was mortally wounded by arrows shot by skulking Comanches. He staggered to his feet, and killed two of his assailants before death ended the fight. His companions, after much



INCIDENTS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF EMIGRANTS

A MIRAGE — A WAGON TRAIN — A FORD OVER A RIVER





## INCIDENTS DURING THE FUR TRADE

suffering, reached Santa Fe, but their leader had paid the toll of the wilderness.

### The Trapper's Characteristics

It is difficult in these later days to comprehend the nature and life of those sturdy wanderers of mountain and plain, the early trappers. They were soon marked by their environment, and developed a peculiar character. The nature of their service had its effect upon physiognomy, language, habits, and dress. The hard life of the trapper impressed itself on all his features. In Chittenden's words:

"He was ordinarily gaunt and spare, browned with exposure, his hair long and unkempt, which, with his dress, often made it difficult to distinguish him from the Indian. The constant peril of his life, and the necessity of unremitting vigilance, gave him a kind of piercing look, his head slightly bent forward and his deep eyes peering from under a slouch hat, or whatever head-gear he might possess, as if studying the face of the stranger to learn whether friend or foe. On the whole he impressed one as taciturn and gloomy, and his life did to some extent suppress gayety and tenderness. He became accustomed to scenes of violence and death; and the problem of self-preservation was of such paramount importance that he had but little time to waste upon ineffectual reflections."

Among these men habits of thrift were practically unknown. They were utterly improvident, and apparently so by deliberate choice. They scorned all effort at economy, and were always poor, spending every cent as soon as it was received.

The earliest of the trappers to push out beyond the Missouri were probably French, of the class

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known as "free," that is, unconnected with any of the big companies, working one or two together independently, and selling wherever they could get the best prices for their furs. But the French trapper preferred the open Plains, and only occasionally could be induced to follow his trade among the gloomy mountain defiles. With few exceptions the mountain trapper was of American blood and training. Before the War of 1812 trapping in the fastnesses of the Rockies was a venture in which only hostile Indians and the rough nature of the country were to be considered. After that time it became largely a struggle for supremacy between the organized fur companies of New York, St. Louis, and Mackinaw. Lisa, Henry, Ashley, the Sublettes, Campbell, Fitzpatrick, Bridger, each in turn, crept up the Missouri, or struggled across the Plains; each had from one hundred to three hundred men behind him, and each one was eager to outwit the others, jealous and suspicious of every stranger. The silent mountain wilderness hid many a deed of violence and treachery. But this was invariably the work of the company men. From the beginning to the end of the fur trade the "free trappers" formed a class by themselves. Their story is in every way honorable. Agnes C. Laut epitomizes it well in her "Story of the Trapper":

"The crime of corrupting natives can never be laid to the free trapper. He carried neither poison nor what was worse than poison to the Indian — whiskey — among the native tribes. The free trapper lived on good terms with the Indian, because

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his safety depended on the Indian. Regenades like Bird, the deserter from the Hudson Bay Company, or Rose, who abandoned the Astorians, or Beckwourth of apocryphal fame, might cast off civilization and become Indian chiefs, but, after all, these men were not guilty of half so hideous crimes as the great fur companies of boasted respectability. Wyeth of Boston, and Captain Bonneville of the army, whose underlings caused such murderous slaughter among the Root Diggers, were not free trappers in the true sense of the term. Wyeth was an enthusiast who caught the fever of the wilds; and Captain Bonneville a gay adventurer, whose men shot down more Indians in one trip than all the free trappers of America shot in a century. As for the desperado Harvey, his crimes were committed under the walls of the American Fur Company's fort. McLellan and Crooks and John Day — before they joined the Astorians — and Boone and Carson and Colter, are names that stand for the true type of free trapper."

### Fights between Whites and Indians.

During these years of exploration and trading, while the land yet remained a wilderness wandered over only by little parties of free or employed trappers, the Great Plains and the waters bordering them were the scene of certain events of sufficient historic importance to warrant brief mention. The first recorded fight between Americans and Indians in this region took place in September, 1807, at the Aricara villages on the Missouri. Here Ensign Pryor of the Army, with fifty men, endeavoring to escort a Mandan chief back to his tribe, was attacked by Aricaras on shore, and compelled to retreat after fifteen minutes of hot fighting. The loss of the whites was three killed and ten wounded, one mortally. This point on the river was later the

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scene of various conflicts, the most serious being the attack on Ashley's men in June, 1823. This battle was fought partly on land and partly on water, and was practically a defeat for the whites, who lost fourteen killed and about as many wounded. It resulted in an army expedition under Colonel Leavenworth being despatched up the river. A three days' battle was waged in which neither side could claim victory. A treaty of peace was patched up, but the Aricaras continued troublesome all through the years of the fur trade.

### Earliest Steamboats on the Upper Missouri

In 1826, Ashley, going West with a party by way of the Platte, took with him a six-pounder wheeled cannon all the way to Utah Lake. This is believed to be the first wheeled vehicle to cross the Plains north of the Santa Fe Trail. In 1831 the first steamboat to navigate the upper Missouri left St. Louis. This was the "Yellowstone," Captain Young. It proceeded as far as Fort Tecumseh. The following year this boat succeeded in reaching Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and by 1859 steamers had pushed up as far as Fort Benton, near where the Teton joins the Missouri.

### Introduction of Smallpox

In 1837 the Indian tribes of the northern Plains were visited by the plague of smallpox. It raged with fearful effect among the Aricaras, Mandans, and Assiniboines, spreading westward to the Crows

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and Blackfeet. The scourge is said to have been introduced by the passage of the annual steamboat of the American Fur Company, the "St. Peters," which had several cases on board. The Mandans suffered most severely, only about thirty remaining alive, and they mostly boys and old men. Chittenden estimates the total loss in the several tribes attacked at more than fifteen thousand, which, considering the probable original population, makes a mortality almost without parallel in the history of plagues. A writer of the time said: "The destroying angel has visited the unfortunate sons of the wilderness with terrors never before known, and has converted the extensive hunting grounds, as well as the peaceful settlements of these tribes, into desolate and boundless cemeteries."

## CHAPTER IX

### BEGINNINGS OF THE SANTA FE TRADE

#### Early Adventurers in the Santa Fe Trade

SOME time between 1609 and 1617 the Spaniards of Mexico came northward and established the town of Santa Fe. For two hundred years it was the centre of Indian strife, being abandoned and reoccupied, yet ever advancing slowly in importance. Spanish traders spread out over the wide Plains to the north and east, making their influence felt as far as the Platte, and penetrating deeply into the canyons of the Rockies. By the time Americans began to show an interest in Santa Fe the settlement had grown to a population of about three thousand, and had become the centre of Spanish political, military, and commercial power on the Mexican frontier.

The Mallet brothers, travelling overland from the Aricara villages, were probably the first adventurers to invade Santa Fe from the East. They arrived there in July, 1739, and returned the next spring by various routes; but their venturesome journey was without direct results. The earliest expedition organized for purposes of trade into Spanish territory was under French auspices, probably some time previous to 1763. The traders transported a variety of merchandise up the Arkansas to about the neighborhood of Pueblo, where they

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opened a temporary store, trading with both Indians and Spaniards. The Spanish authorities, however, soon drove them out. It is believed that other similar expeditions crossed the Texas Plains, but there is no historical record of them.

### The Morrison Expedition

The next commercial expedition originated in St. Louis almost immediately after the transfer of Louisiana to the United States. It was organized by William Morrison, of Kaskaskia, Illinois, his agent being a French Creole named Baptiste La Lande. The Frenchman made a success of the venture, but the profit was not for Morrison, who waited long but in vain for his return. La Lande, carrying his goods on pack animals, took a long way around, ascending the Platte River to the mountains, and then skirting their eastern base to the Spanish settlements. He reached Santa Fe in the Summer of 1804, sold his goods, married a *señorita*, and remained. Lieutenant Pike met him there three years later, apparently contented, thoroughly at home among the Spaniards, his conscience untroubled.

Less than a year after La Lande's entry into Santa Fe another adventurer drifted down there from across the Plains. This was James Purcell, a wandering hunter, originally from Kentucky. Purcell had been west of the Missouri for three years, engaged in a variety of occupations, and in the Spring of 1805 found himself near the source of the



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South Platte with some Indian traders. He was sent by them to the Spanish settlements to seek permission for the party to come there and trade. On his way south, when on the upper waters of the Arkansas, he discovered gold, but was later compelled to throw away the small amount gathered. Purcell reached Santa Fe in June, and apparently liked the place, as he remained there, making money rapidly by working as a carpenter. A year later Pike conducted his exploring expedition into the New Mexican country, the details of which have been given in a previous chapter.

### Troubles with the Spanish Authorities

The animosity engendered by Pike stopped the development of the Santa Fe trade for several years. It was too risky to appeal even to the bold adventurers of the border. In November, 1809, three men, Smith, McClanahan, and Patterson, left St. Louis for the Spanish settlements. They had a Mexican guide, but were never again heard of. Not until 1812 did an organized American trading expedition succeed in reaching Santa Fe, and its reception was most discouraging. It was composed of twelve members, the leaders being McKnight, Baird, and Chambers. Their journey over the prairies was comparatively uneventful until the party forded the Arkansas and entered the sacred territory of New Spain. Here they were immediately seized by the authorities, and their goods confiscated. It was nine years before the unfortunate

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adventurers were released from the rigors of a Mexican prison.

The next American to reach Santa Fe appears to have been Julius de Munn of St. Louis, a partner of A. P. Chouteau in the Indian trade on the upper Arkansas. These two left St. Louis in September, 1815, and on the way they made a trade with a hunter named Phillebert for his entire outfit of furs cached in the mountains, and the time of his men. When they arrived at the appointed rendezvous the *engagés* were absent, and Indians reported that they had gone south into Spanish territory. De Munn started after them, and found them very comfortably situated at Taos; but he pressed on to the capital, with the intention of asking the Governor for permission to hunt on the headwaters of the Rio Grande. He found the Governor courteous, but unwilling to grant such a privilege without consulting those higher in authority. Unable to wait for a final decision, De Munn collected his men and returned across the Arkansas to Chouteau's camp. With two companions he went east to St. Louis the last of February, after a new outfit, making the distance in forty-six days. The next year these same two traders, with a company of forty-five men, were hunting in the Sangre de Cristo Range, and De Munn went again to Santa Fe, only to find a new Governor, and a very chilly reception. From that time they were in constant trouble with the authorities, and on May 24, 1817, they were arrested by Spanish troops, taken to Santa

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Fe, fettered, and thrown into prison. Finally, with all their property confiscated, except one horse each, the unfortunate party were released, with strict orders to leave Spanish territory. They arrived at St. Louis in September.

This treatment, coupled with the misfortunes of three years before, pretty thoroughly halted all immediate efforts at trading with Santa Fe. There is some reason to believe that adventurers visited the settlements of New Mexico during this period, but they did not leave any historical records. A trader named Meriwether was captured by Spanish troops in 1819, and held prisoner for some time. Thirty years later he became Governor of New Mexico. But practically all commercial communication was severed between the two countries until 1821, when the Mexicans threw off the Spanish yoke and seized the reins of government.

### **Increase of Trade after Mexico Became Independent.**

This change resulted in the release of all American prisoners, and opened a door for northern traders. They were not slow in seizing the opportunity. William Becknell, of Missouri, was the first to conduct a successful trading expedition to Santa Fe; he is also known as the father of the famous Santa Fe Trail. With a company of seventy men, he crossed the Missouri at Arrow Rock September 1, 1822, and in rapid march reached the upper Arkansas the last of the month. The party must have halted here some time, as it was the middle of

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November before they arrived at Santa Fe. Here their goods were sold at a handsome profit. Becknell, with a single companion named McLaughlin, reached St. Louis the next January, but his men probably remained hunting in the mountains.

The same year one Jacob Fowler of Kentucky led an independent exploring expedition, starting from Fort Smith. At Glenn's trading-post at the mouth of the Verdigris, he was joined by the proprietor, who acted as guide. The entire party of twenty proceeded up the north bank of the Arkansas. Glenn, with four men, went ahead as far as Santa Fe, where he was well received, and the others soon followed. It was the middle of July before they again reached the American settlements, bringing back with them a number of prisoners released by the Spaniards, including the members of McKnight's party.

The success of these expeditions led to considerable activity along the border. Braxton Cooper and Becknell were the earliest of the traders to get away, and both made successful trips in 1822. The trip of the latter is particularly important, because he went by way of the Cimarron instead of following the Arkansas to the mountains, as had formerly been done. This took him across a grim desert, and was a notable achievement. On this journey the first wagons were taken across the Plains. It was reported that, costing one hundred and fifty dollars each in Missouri, these wagons brought seven hundred dollars apiece in Santa Fe. This achievement

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was accomplished four years before Ashley dragged his cannon to Salt Lake, and eight years before the first wagons crossed the more northern Plains.

For some cause, possibly Indian hostility, little seems to have been accomplished in 1823, although a party of thirty under Colonel Cooper made the round trip successfully. But in 1824 the commerce of the prairies began to assume important proportions. From that date, with the exception of certain periods when the Indians were especially dangerous, the Santa Fe trade constantly increased, and each summer saw the laden caravans moving slowly westward along the broad Trail. The best equipped and organized expedition up to that date crossed the Missouri at Franklyn May 15, 1824. Le Grande, an experienced frontiersman, was in command, and in his party were eighty-one men, one hundred and fifty-six horses and mules, twenty-five wagons, and thirty thousand dollars' worth of merchandise. They made the round trip to Santa Fe in four months and ten days, bringing back one hundred and eighty thousand dollars in gold and silver, and ten thousand dollars' worth of furs.

Unfortunately, from now on we are enabled to gain merely glimpses of events occurring along the Trail. Many, encouraged by such success, rushed into this trade, poorly equipped for the dangers of the route, and unacquainted with either Indian or Spanish customs. The result was often disastrous, leading to suffering, loss, and death. Small parties became the prey of savages, and there were many

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instances of ill-guided parties wandering from the trail in search of a shorter route, and perishing miserably in the desert. Even the larger and ably commanded companies did not always escape scot-free. In 1824 Braxton Cooper, on his third trip, lost two men by Indian attack; and "The Missouri Intelligencer" contained numerous reports of lives sacrificed along the Trail.

### Summary of the Caravans from 1825 to 1834

The following is Chittenden's careful summary of the caravans from 1825 to 1834, as gathered from the columns of various papers published at the time. While incomplete, it yet vividly pictures the importance of the trade, the number engaged, and the perils of the route. It contains many names long identified with border history:

"1825.—Becknell returned from Santa Fe June 1. Marmaduke left Santa Fe May 31; date of arrival in Franklin not known.—Another party left Santa Fe in June, arriving in Franklin August 1, with 500 mules and horses; pursued usual route; went from San Miguel to Canadian; down this stream 300 miles; thence N. E. to Arkansas at mouth of Little Arkansas; thence through Osage country home; were roughly handled by Osages.—May 16, large party, 105 men, 34 wagons, 240 mules and horses, Augustus Storrs, newly appointed consul to Santa Fe, Captain, left Fort Osage for Santa Fe; party returned by detachments at various times and by different routes during fall; a number, among them Storrs, remained.—Another caravan left in May with 81 men, 200 horses and \$30,000 worth of goods; no further record.—A party of Tennesseans left Jackson, Tenn., for Santa Fe in April; returned as far as Arkansas River with some of the above parties and then continued down that stream.

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" 1826.— Early in April a party arrived in Franklin from Santa Fe. About same time party of 100 left for Santa Fe.— About June 1, another party of between 80 and 100 persons, with wagons and carriages of every description left Franklin for Santa Fe.— June 9, six or seven new and substantial wagons laden with goods arrived in Franklin *en route* for Santa Fe; owned by Mexican, Mr. Escudero, who was in charge of them. This was about the beginning of Mexican proprietorship in trade, which monopolized more than half the business in 1843.— It appears that in September of this year a party under Ceran St. Vrain (if we may trust Inman) set out for Santa Fe, arriving there in November; in this party was a runaway boy, Kit Carson, then 17 years old.

" 1827.— Spring caravan from Franklin had 52 wagons and 105 men; Ezekiel Williams, captain; August Storrs and David Workman along; the largest party yet; the only outgoing expedition mentioned, but of course there were others; about 60 of the party returned about Sept. 30, with 800 head of stock, valued at \$28,000; absent four months; cleared 40 per cent.— May 31, . party returned from Santa Fe successful.— July 19, a party of twenty arrived two days before from Santa Fe with several hundred mules and \$30,000 specie.

" 1828.— About 1st of May caravan left Franklin for Santa Fe with \$150,000 worth of merchandise and 150 persons.— May 18, a party was at Blue Springs *en route* to Santa Fe, with 37 wagons, and \$41,000 worth of goods.— September 12, 70 to 80 persons arrived in Franklin from Santa Fe; venture profitable, but lost two men, Munroe and McNees.— Oct. 28, party of 25 arrived in Franklin from Santa Fe; had been attacked by Indians, who stole all their animals, killed John Means of Franklin, and compelled them to cache their specie.— Bent's Fort erected this year; according to some authorities, the following year.

" 1829.— Spring caravan consisted of about 70 persons and 35 wagons; Charles Bent captain; military escort under Major Riley; Samuel C. Lamme killed *en route*; return cargo valued at \$34,000; reached Franklin early in November.— There seems to have been no other caravan this year.

## BEGINNINGS OF THE SANTA FE TRADE

" 1830.—About May 22, party of 120 with 60 wagons left Franklin for Santa Fe, returning in October with fair profits.

" 1831.—May 15, large party, of which Josiah Gregg was a member, numbering nearly 200 and including some ladies, 100 wagons, two small cannon, and \$200,000 worth of goods, left Independence, Mo., and having organized at Council Grove, left that place May 27; crossed the Arkansas June 13, and arrived at San Miguel in due course.—May 21, there was preparing at Franklin a large party for Santa Fe with about \$200,000 worth of goods.—Some of the members had put their entire property in the venture.—One of the above parties returned in October, after a successful trip.—October 20, a party of twenty-five or thirty persons passed Columbia, Mo., for Santa Fe, mostly from Eastern States. It was this year that Smith, Jackson, and Sublette made their unfortunate journey across the plains, in which Smith lost his life.

" 1832.—Principal caravan under Charles Bent; date of departure not given; returned about November 1, with \$100,000 specie and \$90,000 other property.—A party returning in the Fall and Winter of this year attacked by Indians on Canadian, January 1, and lost all their property and one man.

" 1833.—June 20, Spring caravan at Diamond Grove, 184 men, 93 wagons, under Charles Bent; November 9, 100 of above party returned with \$100,000 specie and large amount of other property.—Gregg returned this Fall.

" 1834.—May 24, caravan of about 125 wagons; Gregg probably with it; part of caravan under Captain Kerr left Santa Fe September 10, arrived home in October, 140 men and 40 wagons, with returns amounting to over \$200,000.

"The record of the caravans during the following years is very obscure, although it is certain that they continued as heretofore. Various causes contributed to the deficiency of record."

### Government Survey for a Road to New Mexico

Even as early as 1825 this trade had assumed proportions to arouse Congressional action, ten thousand dollars being appropriated for marking

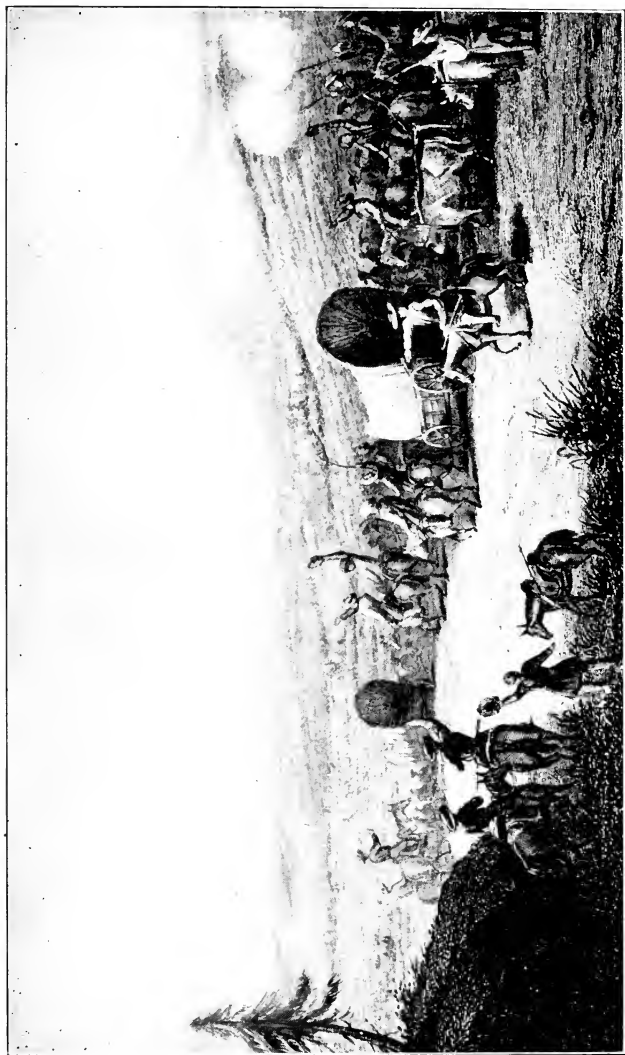


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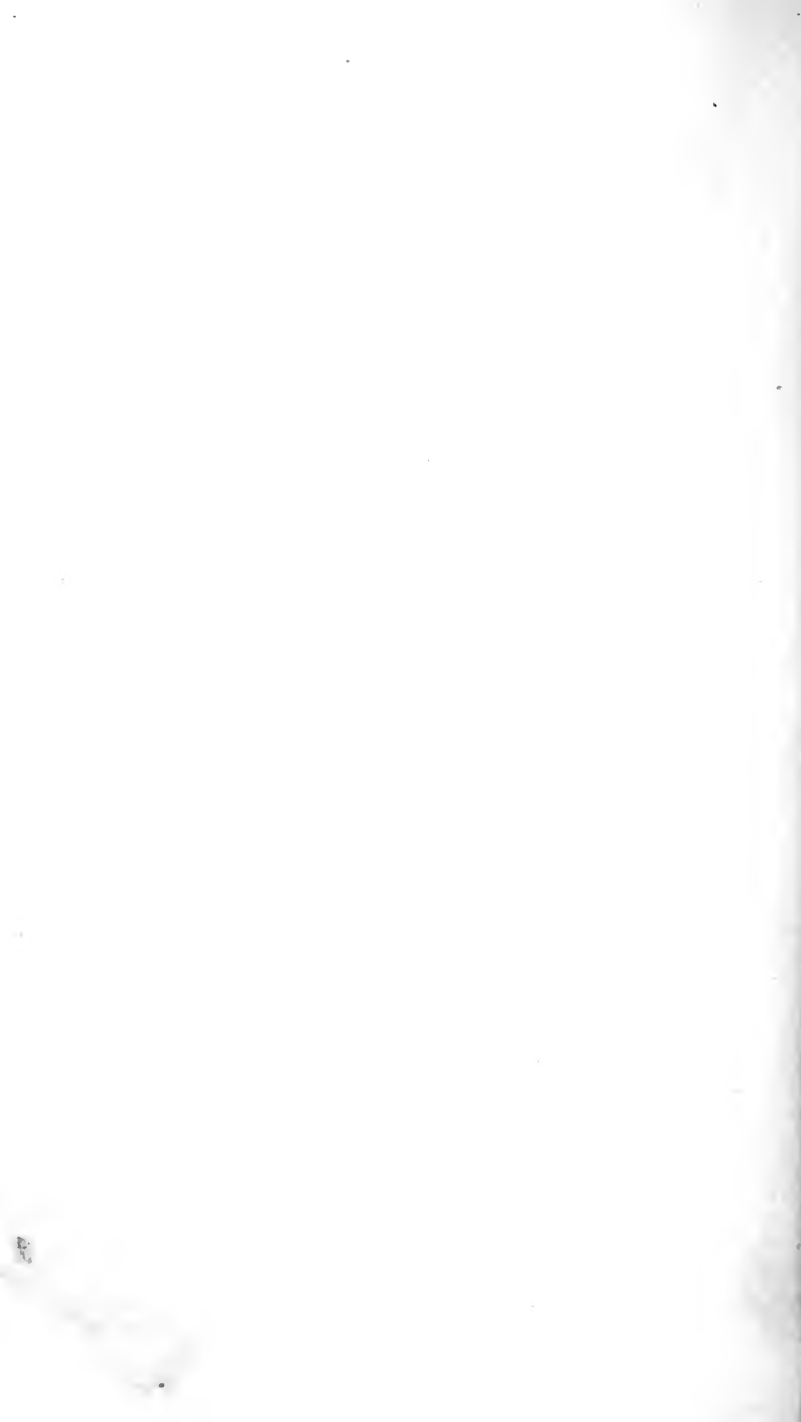
the line of a road from the Missouri River to New Mexico, and twenty thousand dollars for securing concessions from the Indians. A peace commission was appointed, and J. C. Brown selected as surveyor. Brown duly surveyed and marked the road by raised mounds from Fort Osage to the Arkansas, following the course of the old Trail. Instead of cutting across the Cimarron Desert, in accordance with the short Trail already used by the traders, this Government road was run up the Arkansas to Chouteau Island, and then headed directly south to Taos. This route being so much longer, the traders naturally refused to use it. Consequently the survey was of but little practical value.

### Opposition of Indians to the Traders

From the very beginning there was trouble with Indians. In a certain sense what is now Kansas was neutral ground to the surrounding tribes, hunted over by Pawnees, Comanches, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Kiowas, but these were all bitterly opposed to the white invasion, and their raids on the slow-moving caravans were incessant. Few small outfits ever got through without a fight, and many of the larger were robbed, and their stock stampeded. Any straggling from the column was almost certain to result in the sudden dash downward of Indian horsemen. All the surrounding tribes were involved in these attacks, but the Comanches were most feared, and most frequently named as the guilty marauders.



A CARAVAN ARRIVING AT SANTA FE



## BEGINNINGS OF THE SANTA FE TRADE

The passage became so dangerous that in 1829 Government troops were ordered to escort the spring caravan as far as the Mexican frontier. Four companies of the Sixth Infantry, under Major Benet Riley, were assigned to this duty; leaving Round Grove early in June, they were more than a month on the march before reaching Chouteau Island, where they encamped to await the return of the traders. Evidently the Comanches had been on watch all the way, for scarcely had the now unguarded caravan disappeared over the sand hills into Mexican territory, when it was fiercely attacked. A hard fight ensued, but Riley crossed the river with his men, drove off the Indians, and escorted the wagons for another day's march. Not daring to take an armed force any farther into Mexico, he returned to the Arkansas, and went into camp, agreeing to wait there until October 10 for the return of the traders.

The troops passed a summer full of excitement, being constantly annoyed by Indians who durst not attack openly. The tenth of October came, but no returning caravan. Waiting one more day in vain for its appearance Riley mustered his men, and the column began the long march eastward across the now brown prairie. Scarcely had they started when the caravan appeared. It was escorted by Mexican troops under command of Colonel Viscara, and a few days before had had a sharp fight with Comanches, which caused delay. The soldiers of the two countries met cordially, and a review was held

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out on the Plain, the rough frontiersmen of the caravan watching the military evolutions with great interest. "Never," says Chittenden, "since the days when Coronado's soldiers penetrated to the Kansas Plains, had the barren and treeless prairie witnessed a more interesting spectacle." Three days were passed thus in fraternal intercourse, and then the Americans moved eastward on their weary march.

This policy of furnishing escorts did not greatly commend itself to the Government, and was not continued. The large caravans were able to protect themselves, and to furnish troops for every little band making the venture was impossible. Moreover, the greatest peril of attack was after crossing the Mexican frontier. Occasionally, however, troops were sent, one such detachment consisting of sixty dragoons under Captain Wharton in 1834; but this is said to have been the last military escort until 1843.

## CHAPTER X

### INCIDENTS OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

#### Value of the Santa Fe Wagon Traffic

**V**ERY few realize to-day the value of the trade which during those years was carried on by means of wagon and pack mules across the prairies to far-off Santa Fe. At one time it rose to above \$450,000 per annum, and for twenty-two years, from 1822 to 1843 inclusive, averaged over \$130,000 annually, a total of nearly three million dollars. When one considers the disadvantages under which it was carried on, the never-ceasing perils of the way, the long and weary distance travelled, the uncertainty as to the kind of reception that would be granted by the Mexican officials, and the limited capital of the traders, the result is little short of amazing. For this was a business carried on by small dealers. No great company ever operated on the Santa Fe Trail. Not until the last years of the trade did the investments average as high as one thousand dollars to each proprietor. In many cases it was carried on entirely upon credit.

#### Picture of a Caravan

The long journey across the Plains was generally full of interest, and occasionally of excitement and danger. The Trail, as followed by nearly all

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caravans after the first year of experiment, extended from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe, New Mexico, a distance of seven hundred and seventy-five miles. For the first one hundred and fifty miles, as far as Council Grove, the traders usually travelled independently, as the route led through a well-watered prairie country, very seldom invaded by hostile Indians. Here they halted and organized into a caravan, electing various officers to serve during the trip. In the large trains these were quite numerous, including captain, two lieutenants, marshal, clerk, pilot, commander of guards, and occasionally a chaplain. The authority of these officers was, however, small, and much of the loss of life occurred from lack of discipline. The draught animals were horses, mules, and oxen, and, as it was necessary for all to keep together, progress was slow, rarely averaging more than fifteen miles a day. The location of water generally determined the extent of a day's march. As to the personnel, every kind and degree of man was usually present,—sober representatives of business, rough frontiersmen, profane “bull-whackers” and “mule-skinners,” reckless adventurers, travellers seeking new experience, Indians, and Mexicans. All were for the time upon a common level. “The wild and motley aspect of the caravan,” observes Gregg, in his “Commerce of the Prairies,” “would have formed an excellent subject for an artist's pencil.”

# INCIDENTS OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

## The Route

Fully organized and equipped, the wagons stretching out in long line and well guarded by men on foot and horseback, the caravan started forth from the pleasant camp at Council Grove upon the second stage of its advance. This took them to the ford of the Arkansas, known then as the Cimarron Crossing, about where Fort Dodge was subsequently located. As they slowly moved forward, the nature of the country began to change, and they emerged from the beautiful prairies onto the arid plains, while with every step they were exposed to the peril of Comanche and Pawnee raiders. The points of interest on the way, usually marking camping-places, were Diamond Springs, Lost Spring, Cottonwood and Turkey Creeks, the Little Arkansas, and Cow Creek. The main stream of the Arkansas was struck about the site of the present town of Ellinwood, the trail running up the left bank of that stream. On the way it passed Walnut Creek, and came to Pawnee Rock, long considered the most dangerous point on the route. This landmark was of sandstone, about twenty feet high, and stood to the right of the trail, two miles from the river. This was the scene of much desperate Indian-fighting throughout the history of the caravans. Beyond Pawnee Rock the travellers passed Ash Creek, Pawnee Fork, Coon Creek, and "The Caches," so named because two early traders, Chambers and Biard, were obliged to hide their



## THE GREAT PLAINS

goods there in 1822. Just beyond this they came to the ford across the Arkansas twenty miles above the present Dodge City, and three hundred and ninety-two miles from Independence, their journey half done.

The crossing was dangerous because of quicksand, the river bottom very treacherous. Teams were doubled, and the wagons taken across on a run. From now on the trail ran over Mexican soil and led across a barren, desolate desert of constantly shifting sand. After leaving Lower Spring, some sixty miles south from the Arkansas, the caravan entered upon the most dreaded section of their route. For fifty-eight miles, requiring from two to three days to traverse, there was no water. Chittenden says:

"In the earlier years the route was very uncertain, for the wagons made no impression on the hard, dry soil, and no trail was developed. This fact, and a total absence of landmarks, made the danger of getting lost a very serious one, for in that waterless country a day or two of lost time might prove disastrous. This difficulty was removed in 1834 by a fortunate circumstance. It happened that year, quite unusually, that there were continuous and heavy rains while the caravan was passing this part of the route. The wagons cut a distinct furrow on the softened turf, which was followed by subsequent caravans until it developed into a permanent road. It is visible in many places to the present day."

### The "Old" Trail

This portion of the old Trail was mostly in what is now southwestern Kansas, passing near localities now known as Ivanhoe, Conductor, Example, and

## INCIDENTS OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

Zionville. Beyond this the route followed the valley of the Cimarron for eighty-five miles, to McNees' Creek, so named in memory of McNees, who, with Monroe, was killed here in 1828. From this point the trail again became clear and easily followed, although still running through a desert country. Indeed, so little has the region changed between the Cimarron and Santa Clara Spring, a distance of one hundred and seventeen miles, that over much of the way the old trail can still be easily followed. It was at the latter point that the mountain branch from Bent's Fort on the Upper Arkansas united with the main trail. The remainder of the distance to Santa Fe, one hundred and thirteen miles, is almost exactly covered by the rails of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. In the old days the first abode of white men encountered after leaving Council Grove was at Rio Galinas, seventy miles from Santa Fe, the first settlement being San Miguel.

### Tragical Incidents

Almost every mile of this route became during those years of travel a scene of tragedy and suffering. Few of these incidents have become matter of record, and the years have blotted out the memory of names, the deed of sacrifice or daring. From the pages of Chittenden, Gregg, and Inman we may cull a few from among the many. While the 1826 caravan was slowly toiling up the Arkansas a man named Broadus accidentally discharged a

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rifle into his arm. It was a dangerous wound, but the man delayed attending to it, until no other hope for saving his life was left than amputation. One of his companions, believed to be Kit Carson, performed the operation with the only instruments at hand, a handsaw, a butcher knife, and an iron bolt. This rude surgery proved effective, and in a few weeks the patient, constantly travelling with the caravan, was sound and well.

Reference has already been made to a tragedy on the Cimarron in which McNees and Monroe lost their lives. No one ever knew the exact circumstances, but it is believed that the men having fallen asleep, the Indians crept up and shot them with their own guns. McNees was discovered dead, but Monroe lived while the wagon train advanced forty miles. While they were burying him, somewhere in the lonely valley of the Cimarron, a party of Indians appeared across the river. They were apparently friendly and sought a parley, but the white men, aroused by the death of two of their number, fired, and killed all but one.

This same year, 1828, chronicles another death by violence upon the trail. A small caravan, consisting of twenty-one men, one hundred and five mules, and five wagons, was bound East. At the upper Cimarron Springs they suddenly found themselves completely surrounded by Comanches, who insolently ordered them to camp for the night. Believing obedience would mean destruction, the little body began pushing resolutely forward. The In-

## INCIDENTS OF THE SANTA FE TRIAL

dians at once attacked, charging fiercely upon the rear guard, composed of Captain John Means and two men named Ellison and Bryant. These two escaped, but Captain Means was shot down, and scalped while yet alive. Unable to aid him, the caravan pressed on, constantly pursued by the savages and fighting for every mile. Finally they were forced to abandon their wagons, and, taking ten thousand dollars in specie with them, travelled all night and day, and well into the next night, when they reached the Arkansas. Here they cached the specie, and pressed on to Walnut Creek so exhausted they could hardly travel. Five managed to reach Independence, where a rescue party was organized. The sufferers were found scattered along the trail all nearly dead from exhaustion and starvation.

In 1833, according to "The Missouri Republican," a party of twelve traders were attacked on the Canadian River by a large force of Comanches. The fight lasted thirty-two hours, the whites intrenching themselves. Two men, Mitchell and Pratte, were killed. The subsequent escape of the others to the settlements was the occasion of much suffering and hardship, the season being winter, and many of them wounded. It seems to be a fact, if one may judge from the paucity of reports published, that during the earlier years of the Trail, the various tribes of savages through whose country it ran were not particularly hostile to the whites. The attacks on the traders were comparatively few, and can generally be traced to some previous atroc-

## THE GREAT PLAINS

ity perpetrated upon the Indians. Later, it is true, war raged along the border, and the Santa Fe Trail drank deep of blood, as will be described in some of the following pages, but during the passage of the trading caravans back and forth, from 1825 to 1840, more men died on the journey from disease than from Indian attack. Again and again the wagons rolled over the long route without any adventure occurring to break the dull monotony of travel, and, except for the constant possibility of peril, the march became a business routine.

### Hostility of Texans to Mexican Caravans

One occurrence, happening just outside the date limit quoted above, needs to be mentioned here. This was the expedition of Texans to the Trail for the purpose of robbing Mexican traders. Texas was then a Republic, and its people's hatred of the Mexicans waxed strong. In 1843 a certain Colonel Snively led some two hundred men across the deserts to the Arkansas for the purpose of attacking Mexican caravans. Here he was joined by another party of Texans under a man named Warfield, who had just had an unpleasant experience in his attack on the Mexican village of Mora. His men had reached the Arkansas on foot, and pretty thoroughly demoralized. These two worthies advanced their combined forces into the sand hills south of the river, where they ambuscaded some of General Armizo's soldiers, and killed eighteen, without suffering any loss themselves. One Mexican got away,

## INCIDENTS OF THE SANTA FE TRAIL

and rode south with his news, the receipt of which caused Kit Carson to be sent back up the Trail to warn an approaching caravan. After a desperate ride he arrived in time to checkmate the Texans.

All the Mexican caravans were not so fortunate. Don Antonio Jose Chavez left Santa Fe for Independence in February, 1843, with a large outfit, including a private carriage and a retinue of servants. His known wealth had made him a marked man, and a plot was concocted for robbing him, the leader being a Texan named McDaniel. It was at Cow Creek, near the present town of Hutchinson, Kansas, that they lay in wait for their victims. The tragedy was soon over, the employees shot down in cold blood, while the Don was tortured until he revealed his treasure, and then deliberately murdered. But unknown to the murderers one Mexican teamster escaped, rode furiously across the prairie to Leavenworth, where the Government then had a military post, and immediately returned guiding a detachment of United States troops. On the way an old scout and plainsman named Hobbs was met with and pressed into service, and, inside of four days the avengers had overtaken the gang, who were unconscious of pursuit. They killed one, and made the others prisoners. After trial in St. Louis, some were hanged and others imprisoned.

## CHAPTER XI

### EARLY TRANSPORTATION ON THE PLAINS

#### Indian Methods of Transportation

THE earliest method of transporting goods across the Plains must have been upon the shoulders of men, yet long before Cabeça de Vaca wandered through his ten thousand miles of wilderness in search of Mexico, the Indians of the Plains had taken a step upward, and learned to shift their burdens onto the backs of patient dogs. Castaneda, the historian of Coronado's expedition to the buffalo plains in 1541, writes: "They go like Arabs with their tents, and their droves of dogs harnessed with saddle-cloths, and pack-saddles, and a cinch. When their load shifts, the dogs howl for someone to straighten it for them." One hundred years later another Spanish wanderer, Benavides, writes:

"I cannot refrain from mentioning something rather incredible and ridiculous, which is that when these Indians go off to trade the whole *rancherias* go, with their women and children. They live in tents made of buffalo hide, very thin and tanned; and these tents they carry on pack-trains of dogs, harnessed with their pack-saddles. The dogs are medium sized, and it is customary to have five hundred dogs in one pack train, one in front of another; and thus the people carry their merchandise laden, which they barter for cotton cloth, and other things they need."

By the time the first American adventurers had penetrated beyond the Missouri, the horse had come

## EARLY TRANSPORTATION

to the Indian, and been broken to the duties of a burden-bearer. The horse came from the South, gradually overrunning the Plains in wild bands, until the savage tribes as far north as the Missouri were well supplied with them. These wild horses were the descendants of those Arabian steeds brought to the New World by the Spanish conquerors of Mexico. As we think of their probable number ranging the Great Plains as long ago as 1750, it is interesting to take note of their small beginnings, when Cortez, in 1519, brought the first horses to the mainland of North America. According to the historian, Bernal Diaz, there were sixteen horses of the captains, and five mares; and he names and describes the latter with care, mentioning the colt born on their voyage from Cuba. And horses had a price in those days in this new land, when for many a year the market held firm at a thousand pieces of eight. But the increase of the stock the Spaniards imported was marvellous, and the prices fell accordingly until, by 1728, horses were down to six dollars each, and mules to ten. It was the wild horse, straying from its old-time Mexican owner into the freedom of the wilderness, captured again by the roaming savage and reduced to slavery, which, almost in a day, lifted the Indian into a new age of racial development. The tribes of the Plains knew and used the horse for transportation long before men of English blood came wandering into their villages. Yet their accepted method was extremely crude, being merely the



## THE GREAT PLAINS

utilization of two sticks attached to the sides of a horse, the ends dragging on the ground. It was the same plan by which they had loaded their dogs. The French called it the *travois*, and its use was universal from the Great Lakes to Texas.

### Spanish Methods

The next step in the advance of Plains transportation was the pack-train of the early Spaniards. The idea was merely an importation from Europe, but its value in the development of the West is beyond computation. The work of the muleteer became almost an art, and there were few regions so isolated, either in mountain or plain, as to remain long unvisited by the pack-train. The distance travelled, and the value of merchandise and specie transported in this manner, are beyond estimate. In the early history of the Southwest there were ordinary commercial routes, regularly travelled over, more than fifteen hundred miles long. In 1774 Captain Anza took such a train from Sonora to San Francisco, and Coronado wandered the Plains nearly two years, a pack-train bearing his supplies. On the old Vera Cruz Trail it is said that seventy thousand mules were employed each year, the commerce carried on their backs reaching yearly a total of sixty-four million dollars. In those days everything went mule-back, the only concession made to travellers unable to ride in this way being a rude litter on shafts swung to the saddles of two mules walking in single file. Regular commercial routes,



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over which the pack-mules travelled in long columns, were early established between Mexico and the border Spanish settlements along the Rockies, and thus was the pack-train introduced upon the Plains.

As early, possibly, as the beginning of the seventeenth century the first wheeled vehicle made its appearance in this neighborhood, but was probably never used on the Plains outside New Mexico. This was the *carreta*, built without nails or a scrap of iron, being a rude ox-cart, so heavy that no other motive power could pull it. It had two wheels, made from three sections of cottonwood logs, fastened to a wooden axle, and without tires. Some carretas were still in use within the memory of living men; their creaking and groaning while in motion imparted to the traveller a sensation never to be forgotten. The first wheeled vehicles ever used within the limits of what is now the United States were those Zacatecas wagons with which Juan de Onate travelled in 1596 in his expedition to colonize New Mexico. We only know they were hauled by oxen, and that for two centuries following, a fairly regular communication was kept up over the same route.

### The Mexican Pack-Train

The first overland commerce established by Americans was that along the Santa Fe Trail, and until 1827 it was carried on entirely by pack-trains. After that date wagons were introduced, yet the

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other method was never wholly abandoned. The Mexican pack-train, or *atajo*, adopted by the Americans almost in its entirety, was an institution worthy of description. Inman tells the story as follows:

"A pack-mule was termed a *mula de carga*, and his equipment consisted of several parts; first the saddle, or *aparejo*, a nearly square pad of leather stuffed with hay, which covered the animal's back on both sides equally. The best idea of its shape will be formed by opening a book in the middle and placing it saddle fashion on the back of a chair. Each half then forms a half of the contrivance. Before the *aparejo* was adjusted to the mule, a *zalea*, or raw sheep-skin, made soft by rubbing, was put on the animal's back to prevent chafing, and over it the saddle-cloth, or *xerga*. On top of both was placed the *aparejo*, which was cinched by a wide grass bandage. This band was drawn as tightly as possible, to such an extent that the poor brute grunted and groaned under the apparently painful operation, and when fastened he seemed to be cut in two. This always appeared to be the very acme of cruelty to the uninitiated, but it is the secret of successful packing; the firmer the saddle, the more comfortably the mule can travel, with less risk of being chafed or bruised. The *aparejo* is furnished with a huge crupper, and this appendage is really the most cruel of all, for it is almost sure to lacerate the tail. Hardly a Mexican mule in the old days of the trade could be found which did not bear the scar of this rude supplement to the immense saddle."

The load carried by each mule thus equipped averaged three hundred pounds, and was hoisted onto the saddle by two packers, sometimes in a single package, sometimes in two, so prepared as to balance themselves. This load, or *carga*, was secured by a stout rope, drawn as tight as possible under the mule's belly, and laced round the packs.

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The operation seldom required more than five minutes. To quote Inman again:

"An old time atajo, or caravan of pack-mules, generally numbered from fifty to two hundred, and it travelled a *jornada*, or day's march of about twelve or fifteen miles. This day's journey was made without any stopping at noon, because if a pack-mule is allowed to rest he generally tries to lie down, and, with his heavy load, it is difficult for him to get on his feet again. Sometimes he is badly strained in so doing, perhaps ruined forever. When the train starts out on the trail the mules are so tightly bound with the ropes that they move with great difficulty; but the saddle soon settles itself, and the ropes become loosened so that they have frequently to be tightened. On the march the muleteer is kept busy nearly all the time; the packs are constantly changing their position, frequently losing their balance and falling off; sometimes saddle, pack, and all swing under the animal's belly, and he must be unloaded, and repacked again."

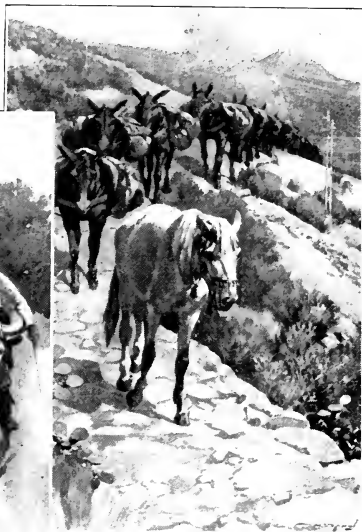
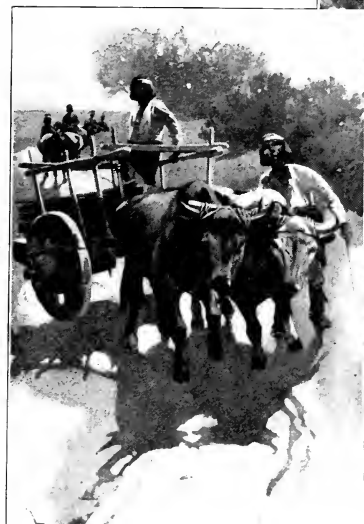
The cost of such transportation was so low that competition, even by wagons in level country, was nearly impossible. Mules were almost a drug on the market, and the muleteer received only five dollars a month with rations, the latter merely corn and beans. If he desired meat he had to hunt for it. On the trail every employee had his place and duty. Each separate band of mules was led by a bell-mare, having a bell strapped about her neck. It was part of the work of the cook of the party to lead this bell-mare on the march, and the humble pack-animals never failed to follow.

### The Prairie Schooner

After 1824 wagons came into general use for the transportation of this prairie commerce, those

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commonly used being manufactured in Pittsburg, and capable of carrying about a ton and a half. They were usually drawn by eight mules or an equal number of oxen. Later in the history of the trail much larger wagons were employed, often hauled by as many as twelve animals. The name "prairie schooner" was applied to them. The first caravan of wagons to cross the Plains—that experimental trip of 1824—was drawn by horses, and accompanied by a long pack-train of mules. Oxen were first used in 1829, and ever after were common on the Plains, the large Missouri-bred mules necessary for the service being quite expensive. The cost of outfitting for the long, dangerous journey was considerable. During the height of the trade the wagons cost two hundred dollars each; mules one hundred dollars each; harness one hundred dollars per wagon; water-kegs and extras twenty-five dollars per wagon. As at least ten mules were required for each wagon the initial cost per wagon was about one thousand three hundred dollars, or for a train of twenty wagons,—as small a number as it was safe to travel with through the Indian country,—twenty-six thousand dollars. Besides this, extra mules had to be taken for use in case of accident. The wagon-master was paid one hundred dollars per month, each driver twenty-five dollars, while there were herders, cooks, and roustabouts to be considered. Altogether it was a venture of importance, and the ambitious Santa Fe trader had to invest heavily. In the last years of



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## PRIMITIVE MODES OF TRAFFIC ACROSS THE PLAINS

THE CARRETA OF THE SOUTH — A MULE PATH AND PACK TRAIN — ONE OF THE  
EARLIEST AMERICAN PACK TRAINS





## EARLY TRANSPORTATION

the trade fully two hundred wagons were upon the Trail.

### Hostility of the Mexican Government to the Traders

For a large part of the time during which this trade flourished, the Mexican Government was openly hostile to the traders. For several years westward-bound caravans would halt on the Cimarron, and send scouts forward to ascertain the feeling of the authorities. From the continual changes in administration no one knew what would be the nature of their reception in Santa Fe. Under the governorship of Armijo a duty of five hundred dollars per wagon, whether large or small, and regardless of what it contained, was charged against the helpless trader. To offset this robbery the freight of three wagons was often transferred to one when within a few miles of Santa Fe, and the empty vehicles burned. To avoid paying the export duty charged on specie, false axle-trees were attached to the wagons, in which the money was concealed.

### Stampedes

During these prairie journeys the perils of a stampede were dreaded almost more than Indian attack, and, indeed, probably resulted in greater loss. Night or day this was a never-absent danger. The mule, patient and good worker as he is, is yet as easily frightened as a Texas steer. A prairie dog barking at the entrance of his burrow, a strange figure in the distance, even the shadow of a pass-

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ing cloud, has been known to start every animal in the train into a wild run. They seemingly go mad, rushing into one another, and becoming so entangled that frequently drivers and mules are crushed to death. They have dashed over precipices and been killed, or strayed so far away as to be lost in the desert. Inman quotes an incident illustrating this, which occurred during a winter military campaign in 1868. The mules of three wagons stampeded, dashed out of sight, and were never found. Ten years later a farmer who had taken up a claim in what is now Rush County, Kansas, discovered in a ravine on his place the bones of some animals, decayed parts of harness, and the remains of three army wagons. These were undoubtedly the lost stampeders.

### The Starting of a Caravan

The starting of one of these great caravans of the Plains on its day's journey was a scene long to be remembered, the wild and motley aspect of the men fitting accurately into the barren surroundings of the desert, and making a vivid picture. "Catch up! Catch up!" is the order of the captain, and instantly all is uproar and apparent confusion. Gregg's description is complete:

"The uproarious bustle which follows, the hallooing of those in pursuit of animals, the exclamations which the unruly brutes call forth from their wrathful drivers, together with the clatter of bells, the rattle of yokes and harness, the jingle of chains, all conspire to produce an uproarious confusion. It is sometimes amusing to observe the athletic wagoner hurrying an animal to its post—to see him heave upon the halter of a stubborn

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mule, while the brute as obstinately sets back, determined not to move a peg till his own good pleasure thinks it proper to do so. I have more than once seen a driver hitch a harnessed animal to the halter, and by that process haul his mulishness forward, while each of his four projected feet would leave a furrow behind. 'All 's set!' is finally heard from some teamster — 'All 's set!' is directly responded from every quarter. 'Stretch out!' immediately vociferates the captain. Then the 'heps,' to the drivers, the cracking of whips, the trampling of feet, the occasional creak of wheels, the rumbling of the wagons, while 'Fall in!' is heard from headquarters, and the train is strung out, and in a few moments has started on its long journey."

## PART II.—THE STRUGGLE FOR POSSESSION

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### CHAPTER I

#### THE FIRST EMIGRANTS

Aspect of the Plains about 1840.

**T**HE Great Plains as they appeared about 1840 now lie outspread before us. To the mass of American citizens living in the Eastern States that territory was then a forbidding desert never to be occupied by man. Only to the adventurers of the border, the hardy trappers, the traders travelling to Santa Fe, and those few army officers who had thus early penetrated the miles of prairie, were its great possibilities vaguely apparent. It was yet barren, desolate, and deserted save for its roaming Indian inhabitants. Much of it remained unknown except to wandering and illiterate hunters. The long stretch of the Missouri River had been navigated; parties of mountain men had made a passable trail up the valley of the Platte; the traders' caravans had gouged out a road to Santa Fe across prairie and desert; some shanties of logs, and a few stockaded forts, for purposes of Indian trading, were scattered here and there along the larger streams between the Missouri and the Rockies, mere pin-pricks in that wide expanse. In eastern Kansas and Nebraska a few hardy settlers were already be-

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ginning to establish habitations, but these, as yet, scarcely ventured to advance beyond sight of the Missouri. In Texas there were settlements, made possible by a militant advance against Mexico; yet these exercised little if any direct influence over the destinies of the more northern Plains. The Government, because of the need of protecting the Santa Fe trade, had established a military post at Fort Leavenworth, but beyond this, and the above mentioned narrow roads of passage, the Great Plains remained an abode of savagery, yet to be conquered and reclaimed. Already those men and women to whom this gigantic task fell were turning their adventurous eyes westward.

### The Turning toward the Northwest and the Southwest

The contest may be said to have fairly begun with the first faint trickle of emigration toward the Pacific coast, and to have become stimulated into earnest activity by the results of the struggle with Mexico. The first turned the thoughts of the people toward the permanent settlement of the Northwest; the second brought to men generally a new conception of the possibilities of the Southwest. Thus was the curtain slightly lifted, and the period of exploration verged into that of the struggle for possession which prefaced permanent habitation. The beginnings of this new movement, although distinct, were slow and uncertain, yet in a comparatively brief space of time—as time is reckoned in a nation's history—the first little wave had swollen

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into a torrent; the trapper, the trader, the soldier, the emigrant, each in turn, passed along the dim wilderness trails, leaving the blackened embers of camp-fires, the deep ruts of wheels, the ghastly relics of battle, yet ever making way for massing settlers behind, constantly broadening out the vista, and making known the truth. It is this period of Indian war and pioneer emigration that constitutes the second advance in the story of the Great Plains.

### Missionaries Bound for the West

To tell it rightly one must hark back slightly farther than the date set, for as early as 1834 travellers other than traders or trappers passed over the then barely traceable trail leading to distant Oregon. These pioneers of a great movement were missionaries, and they travelled in small separate parties from that year until 1839. The Lee brothers, Jason and Daniel, passed this way first. The following year Samuel Parker and Marcus Whitman travelled over the long trail. In 1836, Whitman, who had returned East, came back accompanied by his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Spalding, and W. G. Gray. It is said that at the trappers' rendezvous on the Sweetwater these pioneer white women received a royal welcome at the hands of the gathered mountain men, and were escorted by them some distance on their journey. The remainder of the way they travelled under the armed protection of the American Fur Company. The 1838 party was composed of Mr. and Mrs. Walker, Mr. and Mrs. Eells, and

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Mr. and Mrs. Smith. In 1839 Mr. and Mrs. Griffin, with Mr. and Mrs. Munger, made the journey. These devoted missionaries labored long in the Oregon country, several of them yielding up their lives for the faith. Dr. Whitman, a few years later, made a heroic ride across the mountains and Plains in midwinter, suffering incredible hardships, to bear to Washington the news of the British encroachments on the American settlements on the Columbia. To his self-sacrifice and patriotism the Northwest is greatly indebted.

Not far behind these earliest forerunners of Protestantism came the Catholic devotee. This was P. J. de Smet, a Jesuit, who, under orders of his Superior, came to the upper Missouri in 1840 to minister to the Indian tribes, and whose life henceforth was devoted to their service. The early history of Catholic missions in the northern Rockies is little more than the record of this one devoted missionary. Father de Smet travelled extensively over the Plains and mountains, and wrote his experiences most interestingly. He was loved by the Indians and never molested, the visits of the "Black Robe" always being welcome in the wigwams. His principal labors were among the Flatheads.

### The First Band of Settlers

It was in 1841 that the first band of settlers began crossing the Plains and mountains to Oregon and California. All who had passed that way before were but wanderers, with no settled purpose



## THE GREAT PLAINS

of peopling this new land. But these were settlers, men, women, children, and their slow passage westward marked decisively the beginning of a new era. They toiled slowly up the valley of the Platte, finding their only halting-place in all those thousands of miles the rude fur-trader's fort on Laramie River. These were truly the pioneers, and they were so few, only fifteen; Joel P. Walker, wife, sister, three sons, and two daughters; Mr. Burrows, wife, and child; Mr. Warfield, wife, and child, and a man named Nichols. The loneliness, the terrors, the wonders of that journey to the women and children peering out from under the wagon covers as they moved on through those weary months, can scarcely be imagined. Close behind them toiled over the same dim trail Bidwell's company bound for California; but at Fort Bridger this party turned more directly west following the route later made famous by the gold-hunters. A Mrs. Kelsey was the only woman in the Bidwell company. So in the same year the first emigrants passed over the long trails to both Oregon and California.

### Succeeding Bands

From this date the stream constantly increased in volume. In 1842 a company of one hundred and twelve men, women, and children, under command of Elijah White, went through to the Columbia. They had a train of eighteen great Pennsylvania wagons, with cattle, pack-mules, and horses. The next year an army passed that way, consisting of a

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thousand men, women, and children, bringing with them draft cattle, herds of cows and horses, farming implements, and household goods. This marked the beginning of the end of the old regime. Never again were things the same either on plains or amid the mountains. The period of permanent occupancy had begun.

### The Mormon Hegira

Close upon the heels of these earlier emigrants came the great Mormon hegira of 1847. Words can scarcely picture this movement of thousands, in all conditions of life—men, women, and children,—bearing with them all their worldly possessions, and for months travelling across the wide Plains, seeking that home which they finally discovered amid the deserts of Utah. Driven from Illinois by enraged citizens, leaving behind a deserted city, this body of religious enthusiasts, under the leadership of Brigham Young, struggled through Iowa, suffering torments from the bitter cold of winter, and the floods of spring, until their second winter's camp was established on the banks of the Elkhorn in Nebraska.

But this halt was only temporary. April 9, 1847, the advance guard departed westward, and all others were expected to follow as soon as possible. The party was furnished with a wagon, two oxen, two milch cows, and a tent, for every ten persons. Each wagon was supplied with a thousand pounds of flour, fifty pounds of rice, sugar, and

## THE GREAT PLAINS

bacon; thirty of beans, twenty of dried apples or peaches, twenty-five of salt, five of tea, a gallon of vinegar, and ten bars of soap. Every able-bodied man was compelled to carry some kind of firearm, and do his share of guard duty. The wagons were beds, kitchens, and occasionally boats. The average day's journey was thirteen miles. This advance company were three months in reaching the valley of Great Salt Lake, which was chosen by their leader as the situation for their new home.

Behind them, in great trains, reaching in almost solid procession from the distant banks of the Missouri, toiled the faithful followers of the prophet. This passing of the disciples of the Church of Latter Day Saints across the wilderness was one of the most wonderful sights witnessed upon the Great Plains, equalled, it is true, and possibly surpassed, in mere point of numbers a few years later by the rush of gold-seekers to California; yet, when one considers the difference in organization and purpose, this vast exodus remains almost without parallel in history. Nor did this strange migration cease with the passing of these pioneers. Earnest missionaries of the faith toiled with unremitting fervor in the Eastern States and Europe, their numerous converts, usually poor in all but religious enthusiasm, pressing westward in continuous stream across the prairies up to the time of the coming of the railroads. There was no total cessation of the tide. Thousands crossed the Great Plains dragging hand-carts containing their baggage, although the Church

## THE FIRST EMIGRANTS

authorities provided wagons for the women, children, and sick. These hand-carts were primitive but strong, the shafts five feet long, of hickory or oak, with cross pieces. Under the bed of the cart was a wooden axle-tree, the wheels being also made of wood, with a light iron band. The entire weight averaged about sixty pounds. To each hundred persons the Church furnished twenty of these hand-carts, five tents, three or four milch cows, and a wagon to be drawn by three yoke of oxen. The quantity of clothing and bedding taken was limited to seventeen pounds per capita, and the freight of each hand-cart was expected to be about one hundred pounds.

### Route of the Mormons

The large majority of this Church army travelled westward from Council Bluffs up the valley of the Platte, following a trail now cut deep into the soil of the prairie. Yet there were side streams from points farther south, the one most used leading from Independence, Missouri, northwest across the Plains until it united with the main current of travel at Grand Island. This, a little later, became an important route for emigrant trains bound for California and Oregon, and still later was raced over by overland coaches and the pony express. Others of the Mormons, although usually traveling in much smaller parties, advanced up the valley of the Arkansas, and skirted the eastern base of the Rockies on their long journey to the "Promised Land." Such a company brought the first

## THE GREAT PLAINS

American families within the present limits of Colorado, residing on the site of Pueblo throughout the Winter of 1846-47. Houses were erected by them, a number of children were born, numerous deaths occurred, and there is a record of one wedding.

### Sufferings on the Journey

During the course of this passage across the wilderness much suffering and hardship occurred, but there is no record of Indian attack. Exposure and death left many along the trails. One large company, having yet a thousand miles to travel, decided to press on as late as the last of November, thus braving a winter on the Plains and in the mountains. At first they travelled fifteen miles a day, but were soon delayed by breaking axles, and other accidents. At Wood River their cattle stampeded, and thirty head were lost. The beef cattle, milch cows, and heifers were yoked up, but did little service, and the allowance of food was reduced to one meal a day. On reaching Laramie, where they hoped to procure provisions, they found none. Again the ration was reduced, men able to work each receiving twelve ounces of flour daily; women and old men, nine ounces; children, four to eight. The weather grew severe, and they suffered greatly from cold. Before them loomed the grim mountains already white with snow. The old and infirm began to die, and each camp was a burying-ground. Then the able-bodied commenced falling out, some dying in the shafts of their carts. While yet six-



MORMON HAND-CART EMIGRANTS EN ROUTE TO UTAH

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teen miles from the nearest possible camp on the Sweetwater, it began to snow, and their last ration of flour was issued. At this moment of despair messengers reached them, saying a train of supplies was only two or three days ahead. Encouraged by this news, the survivors managed to drag forward, but during the night five died of cold and exhaustion.

The next morning the snow was a foot deep, and they had left only two barrels of biscuits, a few pounds of sugar and dried apples, with a quarter of a sack of rice. They determined to remain in camp, sending forward the captain and one of the elders in search of the supply train. During those three days of waiting the sufferings of the party were intense. Many sickened and died. One writer says:

"Some expired in the arms of those who were themselves almost at the point of death. Mothers wrapped with their dying hands the remnant of their tattered clothing around the wan forms of their perishing infants. The most pitiful sight of all was to see strong men begging for the morsel of food that had been set aside for the sick and helpless."

Late in the night of the third day the help so long waited for reached them. Yet it came almost too late to save. In Inman's words:

"Some were already beyond all human aid, some had lost their reason, and around others the blackness of despair had settled, all efforts to arouse them from their stupor being unavailing. Each day the weather grew colder, and many were frost-bitten, losing fingers, toes, or ears, one sick man, who held on to the wagon bars to avoid jolting, having all his fingers



## THE GREAT PLAINS

frozen. At a camping ground at Willow Creek, fifteen people were buried, thirteen of them frozen to death."

Beyond this point the weather moderated, and, when the struggling remnant arrived at Salt Lake, they had a death roll of sixty-seven out of four hundred and twenty. Martin's party, six hundred strong, journeying a few miles behind, also suffered severely upon the North Platte, but got through with less serious loss of life.

The number passing westward in this Mormon movement has never been estimated, but certain figures can be given as evidence of its importance. The first scouting party, led in person by Brigham Young, numbered 143 men and convoyed a train of 73 wagons. Next behind these followed 1,200 men, women, and children with 397 wagons; then the Kimball company of 662 persons and 226 wagons; then those under charge of Richards, 526 people with 169 wagons.

### Increased Migration to Oregon

At the same time the migration to Oregon was steadily increasing. In 1849 fourteen hundred Mormons passed Fort Bridger. A peculiar fact of these early migrations is that few, if any, paused *en route*. Not even rumors of gold deposits in the Black Hills, or the Big Horn Range, sufficed to halt the current flowing steadily toward Salt Lake and the Pacific. Occasionally a few adventurers were thus turned aside, yet their discoveries, if any, made no perceptible mark on history. An illustration is af-

## THE FIRST EMIGRANTS

forded by the story of thirty men deserting from Captain Douglas's party in 1852. They started out to prospect in the Black Hills, but were never again heard of. Bancroft reports that in 1876 evidence of their work was discovered on Battle Creek, together with fragments of skeletons, and numerous mining tools. They were probably killed by Indians.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY ARMY SERVICE

#### The Search for Passes across the Rockies

**I**N BOTH exploration and exploitation of this Western country the Government was extremely slow to act. After the return of Lewis and Clark from the Northwest, and Pike from the Southwest, nothing beyond the futile expedition of Long to the Rocky Mountains was attempted until 1842. It is true that in the meantime Captain Bonneville had traversed the Plains and made numerous discoveries in the mountains beyond, which had added to the world's knowledge; but his journeyings were without Government sanction, and undertaken merely from a spirit of adventure. During his prolonged absence from duty his name was even stricken from the army roll, to be replaced, in recognition of his achievements, some years later.

In 1842, however, the increasing migration westward induced the authorities to fit out an army expedition for the discovery of the best possible routes through the mountains to the Pacific. The fact that such trails had already been discovered, and long followed, by the mountain men in their trapping and trading journeys, was seemingly ignored as being unworthy of credence. In this connection an anecdote of old Jim Bridger, although occurring much later, is characteristic of this official blind-

## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

ness to knowledge already possessed by many. While seeking a low pass for the Union Pacific Railroad, the chief engineer sent a hurried message to this famous trapper, then living in Missouri, to meet him at the base of the Rockies for important consultation. Bridger made the trip by stage, and his disgust was deep indeed when he arrived and learned the cause of his long, hard journey. Swiftly he described and sketched the exact pass required, and through which the railroad now runs. He added angrily that he could have sent them all they desired from his own home, if they had only informed him first what was wanted. His expressions of contempt for such unnecessary disturbance of his peaceful old age were profanely eloquent.

### Fremont's Fitness for the Work

The officer selected by the War Department for this purpose of unlocking the secrets of the West, was Lieutenant John C. Frémont, who had already travelled the Plains in company with Nicollet. He was connected with the Corps of Topographical Engineers, and in many ways was well fitted for the task. Upon his mountain adventures it is unnecessary to dwell, although most of his discoveries were rather to be credited to those well selected scouts who guided him, old mountain men, of whom the most celebrated were Kit Carson, Jim Baker, and a Frenchman named Godey. In prosecuting his work Frémont made four trips across the Plains, three under orders of the Government, and one on his

## THE GREAT PLAINS

own individual account. The information thus gathered was of great value to subsequent migration, and gave the Lieutenant wide fame as explorer and pathfinder. Being in California at the outbreak of the war against Mexico, he acted promptly with the small force under his command, and held that territory for the United States after several skirmishes. These various expeditions were exceedingly picturesque, and filled with wilderness adventures. Published in all details, they quickly appealed to the imagination of the people and made Frémont a popular hero, nearly landing him in the presidential chair.

### The Sources of the Missouri and the Columbia

On his first journey, in 1842, his party, numbering twenty-eight, was composed largely of French voyageurs, with Kit Carson as guide. This famous borderman had run away from home at fifteen to join one of the early caravans to Santa Fe, and passed all the remainder of his life on the plains and in the mountains. His adventures among Indians and wild beasts would fill volumes, and his experience well fitted him for the position he now assumed. The party, excellently equipped, proceeded up the Missouri as far as Chouteau's trading-house, four hundred miles above St. Louis. Here, on June 10 they started out across the prairies. The journey was enlivened by numerous buffalo hunts, and several councils with Indian tribes. After thirty days' travel the company reached Saint Vrain's

## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

Fort on the South Fork of the Platte. Four days later they were on the Laramie River. The two months passed by the party in the neighborhood of South Pass included an ascent of that high ridge since known as Frémont's Peak, and a brief exploration of the sources of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers. The explorers then returned homeward, arriving at St. Louis in October.

### Frémont's Journey to Oregon by the South Pass

Frémont's second expedition occurred in the years 1843-44, taking him to Oregon and California; in results it was by far the most important of all his journeys. It was also filled with adventure and hardship. He took with him thirty-nine men, leaving the little town of Kansas, on the Missouri, May 29. The route lay up the valley of the Kansas to the head-waters of the Arkansas, where Frémont hoped to discover some practicable opening through the range. Not successful in this quest, the party journeyed northward along the foot-hills, and finally crossed the mountains by way of South Pass. While on the Plains they saw many large emigrant trains slowly toiling toward Oregon.

The third expedition, undertaken in the Fall of 1845, had for its object the discovery of a new route toward the Columbia country. But upon his arrival at the Pacific coast the war with Mexico suddenly disarranged his further plans of exploration, and he at once undertook the conquest of California.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

His fourth and last trip was made as an individual, and after he had resigned from the army. It was a disastrous adventure, and occurred in the Winter of 1848-49. His party left the upper waters of the Arkansas under the guidance of old Bill Williams, a famous mountaineer. Williams either never knew, or through age had forgotten, the country to be traversed, and almost from the beginning, became lost, the company wandering aimlessly about in deep snow and winter storms. Their sufferings were intense, their situation desperate. Ten of his men, one-third of the entire company, died from exposure and starvation, before the remnant staggered into the safety of the Mexican settlements.

### Other Explorations

After Frémont's expeditions the people of the Eastern States became vitally interested in the opening up of the West, and the Government at Washington was stimulated to undertake new explorations. These were carried on largely by the War Department; but while of very real importance in adding to the stock of geographical knowledge regarding this region, they were not extensive, or particularly interesting in either incident or adventure. The most important of them were under command of Captain R. B. Marcy, who thoroughly explored the Red and Wichita Rivers, and the country of the Comanches, including the Staked Plains. A trail westward from Fort Smith was also marked by this officer, and was largely used by emigrants.

## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

### Mormon Atrocities

While the Plains were yet uninhabited and unsought by white settlers, the army was twice called upon to march across them in considerable force, to enforce law and wage war. The first occasion was in the struggle against Mexico; the second was the Mormon campaign, beginning in 1857. Already, and for years, the well-beaten trails leading toward the Rockies and the far-off Pacific were black with the wagons of emigrants and gold-seekers. It is impossible to estimate their number, or to say how many adherents of the Mormon Church were by this time gathered in and about Salt Lake. We only know that the Mormon population had increased so rapidly in ten years that their strength had made the Church officials arrogant, and, probably under their orders, the ignorant followers had been guilty of many atrocities. Emigrant trains were attacked and robbed; even murder had been committed by adherents of the Church, disguised as Indians, with seemingly no fear of punishment, the Utah authorities openly defying the Government at Washington to attempt arrests. To punish these people and bring them to a realization of the necessity of obedience to law, an army expedition was organized at Fort Leavenworth in the Summer of 1857. It was splendidly equipped, and started overland with immense trains of supplies. The troops taking part in the march were the Fifth and Tenth Infantry, with two batteries of Light Artillery. Owing to



## THE GREAT PLAINS

the Free-soil troubles then raging in Kansas, the Second Dragoons, detailed for the march, were halted in that Territory, and the expedition went forward without cavalry. Colonel Alexander was in command, and conducted the march across the Plains, but was later superseded by Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston, who joined the column with a detachment of horsemen on November 3, thirty-five miles from Fort Bridger.

### Campaign against the Mormons

The main incidents of this campaign, and its sufferings, occurred in the mountainous country, but may be briefly summarized. Annoyed in every possible way by Mormon militia, Colonel Alexander's small command of infantrymen were in a desperate plight, when Colonel Johnston came up and assumed control. It was now so late in the season, the ground covered with snow and the animals starving, the officers determined to go into winter camp at Fort Bridger. Short as the distance was, they were fifteen days marching those thirty-five miles. The weather was bitter, many of the men being badly frost-bitten. In one regiment of cavalry fifty-seven head of horses and mules perished of cold in one encampment on the Sweetwater. In the camp at Black Fork five hundred animals were frozen to death in one night. A day's march barely achieved two miles. At Bridger they found nothing but smoke-blackened walls, the Mormons having burned the buildings. Nevertheless the



EARLY STREET SCENE IN SALT LAKE CITY



THE CABIN HOME OF A MORMON FAMILY

SCENES PICTURING THE SETTLEMENT OF UTAH BY  
THE MORMONS



## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

troops camped there, making every possible use of the ruins, and living at first on slaughtered oxen. It was a winter of great suffering; but men and officers toiled incessantly, and when spring opened, the command was in good condition to take the field. Two expeditions in search of supplies travelled to Oregon and New Mexico. They were desperate ventures, and the soldiers composing them suffered greatly, but were successful in their quest. Captain Marcy, in command of the New Mexican expedition, returned by way of the Plains, skirting the eastern base of the mountains. As spring approached, Brigham Young, realizing the uselessness of prolonging resistance, permitted the troops to advance to Salt Lake without subjecting them to further molestation. Here the newly appointed Governor, Cummings, at once took charge, and the military campaign ended without bloodshed. Nothing was done in punishment of Mormon atrocities, but henceforward Utah came under the direct control of the United States.

### Forts Built to Control the Indians

From 1848 to 1860 the Indians of the Great Plains were more or less hostile and troublesome, although not openly upon the warpath. For their better control, and hoping thus to safeguard the constantly passing emigrant trains, army posts were established at various points in the prairie wilderness. These were at first very primitive, designed for merely temporary purposes, and seldom garri-

## THE GREAT PLAINS

soned by more than a company of infantry or a troop of horse. Those particularly worthy of mention were Forts Pierre and Berthold, on the Missouri, in what is now the Dakotas; Fort Kearney, at Grand Island on the Platte; Fort Laramie, on the North Fork of the same stream; Fort Atkinson, near the great bend of the Arkansas; Fort Union, in eastern New Mexico; Fort Washita, near the confluence of the Washita with the Red in northern Texas; Fort Belknap, on the upper Brazos; Fort Chadbourne, near the eastern limits of the Staked Plains; and Fort Lancaster, on the lower Pecos. The service at these isolated posts, at times severed from all communication, and surrounded by hostile savages, was most severe and trying. All the posts had their tales of soldier heroism and sacrifice, for the region round about each was a scene of almost constant skirmishing. During the later years of this occupancy the wide Plains were almost continually scouted over by small detachments of troops, passing from post to post, ever seeking to keep control over the wandering tribes, and protect the onflowing army of emigrants.

### Escorts for Emigrant Trains

Perhaps the most tiresome, yet necessary service given those regulars serving on the Plains during this period was that of guarding emigrant or trading caravans. This was almost incessantly kept up for many years, even to the time of building the Pacific Railroad. Its story would reveal many a

## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

forgotten fight, many a heroic adventure. This escort duty was always distasteful, but that with a "bull" or ox-train was the worst. Colonel Forsyth writes thus of it from the bitterness of his own experience:

"Oh, the tedium of it all! The starting twice a day in the small hours of both meridians: the dismal journey of from seven to twelve miles in a trip of one or two hundred miles and return. The train, numbering from twenty to fifty wagons, rolled out in the matutinal twilight to an accompaniment of cracking whips, of yells and teamsters' oaths, the officer commanding the escort, bored and sleepy, riding a few yards ahead of the leading wagon, the escort scattered about where it could do the most good in the event of sudden need. At the end of the first mile up gallops a wagon master. 'Leftenant,' he says, 'Hunk Hansen has shed a tire, and we'll have to put it back.' Everything stops, for it will not do to separate the train. The tire is put on and a fresh start made. Half an hour later a wagon master is at the escort commander's side again. 'That idiot Doby Dave,' he exclaims, 'never told me he had a split yoke before we left camp, and now it's come apart, blast him! and I've got to go through the wagons or band the yoke.' 'Which can you do more quickly?' asks the lieutenant patiently. 'Band her.' 'Do it, then.' Another halt, another half hour or hour lost, and so it goes through the day, day after day, in rain and shine, always in heat, for freighting is possible only when the grass is green. And there is ever a steady strain of responsibility on the officer. He well knows that he is followed and watched, and should he be caught napping he will surely have to pay the penalty, for the stock is a prize that the Indians will risk much to secure. They know his route, the length of time he will be on the road, and his destination, and he must act accordingly. The men, naturally enough, become weary of the slow progress, the short halts, and the nightly hard guard duty. They do not care to affiliate with the teamsters, and get tired of each other, and, in fact, it is a dreary business all around. As the train is groaning and creaking its slow way over a bit of rolling country, a

## THE GREAT PLAINS

cry of 'Indians, Indians!' suddenly comes from the flankers, and a band of Indians dash rapidly forward out of a hollow toward the wagons, yelling and firing as they advance. The soldiers spring quickly to their stations and promptly return the fire, and the drivers instantly begin to form a park by turning their teams. So the Indians, seeing that the attempted stampede is a failure, fire a parting volley and disappear. They had hoped to surprise the train and run off some of the cattle. A day or two later an attempt will be made to wile away the herd, and the guard, expecting such an effort, will frustrate it. However, the Indians were not always unsuccessful; wagon trains were bereft by them of every animal they possessed, and the mortified losers compelled to wait ingloriously for relief to arrive from some adjacent post or else go after it on foot."

### A March of Troops Across the Plains

This same interesting writer on frontier army life thus graphically describes a scene most common during all this period, the day's march of a column of troops across the Plains:

"During the first hour, or until the sun is well up, the command plods along slowly, the men's legs are not limbered up, and sleep still hovers about their eyelids; but gradually a hum of talk and laughter rises, and in time every one strikes his regular pace, the company officers get together at the head of their organizations, and the distance between the column and the wagon train which followed it out of camp increases. During the ten-minute halts in each hour, the men skylark and everything is cheerful and merry. Later, as the total of miles travelled grows large, the hum and buzz dies down; during the halts the men lie on their backs instead of skylarking; and when the march is resumed it takes a minute or two to fall into the regular gait, and the head of the wagon train, out of sight a little while ago, is seen to draw steadily nearer. The battalion slowly drags itself to the top of a rise as the head of the column gains it, and the music boys see on the plain far ahead a dark line, which they know to be bushes or trees, and it shows the next camp ground,

## EARLY ARMY SERVICE

for they mark the location of water. A thrill runs through the command. The talk begins again, the feet grow lighter, and the last two or three miles are dashed off at a rattling pace. Camp is reached, and it is about twelve o'clock. The cavalry, which left the last camp half an hour after the infantry, has, by passing it on the way, arrived an hour earlier, and is already comfortably settled for the night.

"Sometimes at night, when the weather was clear and not overcold, the men would lie wide awake upon their backs for hours at a stretch, looking straight up at the wonderful beauty of the heavens, talking to each other in low tones, and enjoying to their hearts' content the awe-inspiring sight of a starlight night far out on the plains, where the air is so pure that the stars seem to shine with a lustre unknown to those of mountains and cities, and to swing lower in the blue vault of heaven than anywhere else. It is such hours as these that help to lend the nameless fascination to a soldier's life on the Plains, that never entirely leaves him, and often stirs his blood even years after he has left the service and is a gray-haired man with a growing family around him; that safely anchors him to a civil life."



## CHAPTER III

### DURING THE WAR WITH MEXICO

#### General Kearney Invades Mexico

**I**N APRIL, 1846, Mexico declared war against the United States, and a month later the President called into the field 50,000 volunteers. General Kearney was given command of the army intended for action in the West, and this force was divided into three separate commands. The first, led by himself, was destined to the Pacific coast; a thousand volunteers, under Colonel Doniphan were to descend upon Chihuahua; while the third division, commanded by Sterling Price, was expected to garrison Santa Fe, and retain control of New Mexico.

In this connection, Inman records an interesting story of the Plains, as follows:

“Early in the Spring of 1846, before it was known, or even conjectured, that a state of war would be declared, a caravan of twenty-nine traders, on their way from Independence to Santa Fe, beheld, just after a storm, and a little before sunset, a perfect, distinct image of the Bird of Liberty, the American eagle, on the disc of the sun. When they saw it, they simultaneously and almost involuntarily exclaimed that in less than twelve months the Eagle of Liberty would spread his broad plumes over the Plains of the West, and that the flag of our country would wave over the cities of New Mexico and Chihuahua.”

The value of this vision, and the truth of its fulfilment, can be left to the judgment of the reader.

## DURING THE WAR WITH MEXICO

General Kearney's army moved out onto the prairie from Fort Leavenworth, in detached columns, during the Summer of 1846, and took up its long march through the wilderness. It consisted of two batteries of Artillery, three squadrons First U. S. Dragoons, the First Regiment of Missouri Cavalry, two companies of Infantry, and a detachment of Topographical Engineers. By August this force was concentrated in camp on the old Santa Fe Trail, about nine miles below Bent's Fort on the Arkansas. The incidents and adventures of this march over the Plains have been recorded in detail by the commandant of the Engineers, Lieutenant W. H. Emory, and John T. Hughes of the Missouri Cavalry. I use their report freely as quoted by Inman.

At the first planning of this expedition it was gravely questioned by officials whether so large a body of troops could be marched such a distance over an uninhabited waste, having no base of supplies, and totally severed from all possibility of reinforcement. It was considered an experiment, and a dangerous one, yet an immense amount of provisions was carried in huge wagons, carefully guarded, and beef cattle were driven the entire distance. These subsisted entirely by grazing on the nutritious buffalo grass bordering the trail. At night it was the custom to confine them in a corral formed by the wagons, although occasionally they were tethered to an iron picket-pin driven fifteen inches into the hard ground. At the outset of the

## THE GREAT PLAINS

march the horses made considerable trouble. Many of them being only half broken and unused to military display, the fluttering flags, the rumbling of caissons, the pealing trumpets, and the rattling sabres proved too much for their nerves, and there were numerous wild stampedes, the frightened animals scampering pell-mell across the prairie. Rider and arms left behind, the excited troop horse enjoyed to the full his liberty. No fatal accidents occurred, however, and the straying horses were all eventually recovered.

The troops marched in separate bodies. We have record of such a detachment going into camp on the 9th of July, in what is now McPherson County, Kansas, where the trail crossed the Little Arkansas. The mosquitoes, gnats, and black flies were so fierce as to drive men and horses frantic. Lieutenant-colonel Ruff of the Missouri volunteers was in command, and his men were very short of provisions. Knowing a loaded train was ahead near Pawnee Fork, he had sent a scout forward to halt it until he could come up. While he waited for this scout to return, word reached him that Doniphan's and Kearney's men, just behind him, were also in a starving condition. To make sure of early relief he sent other couriers hastily forward to overhaul the wagon train, and one of them, attempting to ford the fork of the Pawnee, was drowned. His body was recovered and given a military burial. This was the first loss that occurred to the expedition on the Plains. Hughes writes thus of the scene

## DURING THE WAR WITH MEXICO

presenting itself as the soldiers approached the river. Comparing its appearance then with its appearance now, the great change wrought by settlement can be clearly realized.

“In approaching the Arkansas, a landscape of the most imposing and picturesque nature makes its appearance. While the green, glossy undulations of the prairie to the right seem to spread out in infinite succession, like waves subsiding after a storm, and covered with herds of gambolling buffalo, on the left, towering to a height of seventy-five to a hundred feet, rise the sun-gilt summits of the sand hills, along the base of which winds the broad, majestic river, bespecked with verdant isles, thickly beset with cottonwood timber, the sand hills resembling heaps of driven snow.”

### Crossing the Pawnee

It was on July 15 that these separate detachments formed junction at Pawnee Fork, within the limits of what is now the city of Larned, Kansas. The waters of the stream were so high that fording was impossible, and the soldiers were immediately employed in cutting down cottonwoods and building a rude bridge. Over the tree trunks the army passed safe to the other shore, bearing in their arms the sick, and all the equipments of the camp. The horses were compelled to swim, while the empty wagons were floated across, and hauled up the slippery bank by tugging soldiers. This required the incessant labor of two days; and then the little column pressed resolutely forward, the infantry plodding along beside the cavalry, although the marching feet became terribly blistered, marking their passage with blood. Two days later, somewhere

## THE GREAT PLAINS

along the Arkansas, Major Howard, an officer who had been sent forward to Santa Fe to learn the situation, rejoined them. His report was that the common people of New Mexico favored the conditions of peace proposed by Kearney, but that the officials were hostile and making active preparations to resist invasion. Two thousand three hundred men, he said, were already under arms in Santa Fe, while another large force was being rapidly organized at Taos. The little army of Americans received this startling news with gallant cheers, and pushed forward with new vigor, eagerly hoping for a fight.

### On Mexican Soil

The Cimarron crossing of the Arkansas was reached on the twentieth. It was a day of adventure. During the last thirty miles the column had been in the midst of great herds of buffalo. Suddenly a bunch of about four hundred swept up from out the valley, and charged headlong through the marching ranks. Instantly all was turmoil and confusion, but the troops rallied, made a counter-charge, using guns, pistols, even drawn sabres, killing many of the animals, and driving the remainder helter-skelter over the Plains. On the way up the river a few Mexican prisoners were taken, but subsequently released, and, on the twenty-ninth, the soldiers finally crossed the Arkansas and made their first camp on Mexican soil about eight miles below Bent's Fort. Here they established strong guard lines in protection against both Mexicans

## DURING THE WAR WITH MEXICO

and Comanches. But they had an unexpected enemy to cope with. During the night prowling wolves stampeded the animals, and more than a thousand horses broke away from their guards and dashed madly over the prairie, frightened yet more by dangling lariats and pounding picket-pins. Many were followed for thirty to fifty miles before they were recaptured, and nearly a hundred were never recovered. While at this camp several chiefs of the Arapahoes appeared, and were hospitably entertained. They were especially impressed by the cannon.

In preparation for a general advance, twenty men, under Lieutenant de Courcy, were sent forward to scout in the direction of Taos. While on this trip the little party had an unusual experience with the obstinacy of the army mule, since related by the commander. He says:

“We took three pack-mules laden with provisions, and, as we did not expect to be long absent, the men took no extra clothing. Three days after we left the column our mules fell down, and neither gentle means, nor the points of our sabres had the least effect in inducing them to rise. Their term of service with Uncle Sam was out. ‘What’s to be done?’ said the sergeant. ‘Dismount,’ said I. ‘Off with your shirts and drawers, men! tie up the sleeves and legs, and each man bag one twentieth part of the flour.’ Having done this, the bacon was distributed to the men also, and tied to the cruppers of their saddles. Thus loaded we pushed on, without the slightest fear of our provision train being cut off.”

### A Bloodless Victory at Las Vegas

The little army, with flags flying and everything in military array, began its bold advance into the

## THE GREAT PLAINS

enemy's country on the second of August. While it was passing Bent's Fort, the occupants ran up a large American flag, and the flat tops of the houses were densely crowded with interested spectators. Among them were many Mexican girls and Indian squaws. The troops advanced steadily without alarm until they approached the Mexican town of Las Vegas. Here scouts reported the enemy as being strongly entrenched in a mountain pass a few miles beyond the village, where they proposed giving battle. The soldiers were at once thrown into battle line and hurried forward, the dragoons and St. Louis mounted volunteers in the lead. Cartridges were distributed, the cannon swabbed and rigged, the port fires set burning, and every rifle loaded. The men were eager for the clash of arms.

Yet all these preparations were in vain. Las Vegas was entered without the firing of a shot, and the officials of the village took oath of allegiance to the United States, swearing upon the Cross instead of the Bible. Hardly delaying long enough for this simple ceremony the eager soldiery swept straight on toward that canyon where they yet hoped for the grapple of arms. August 16, on the Pecos River, near the village of San Jose, three Mexican spies were captured. The most important of these, a son of General Salezar, was held prisoner, but the others were released. It was learned later that these thoroughly frightened Mexicans had reported to their own people that the invading force was five thousand strong, with an immense number of cannon.

## DURING THE WAR WITH MEXICO

### Flight of the Mexicans from Apache Canyon

Armijo, in command of the Mexican defenders, had by this time assembled seven thousand troops, most of them well armed, and occupied a strong position in Apache Canyon. But this news of the numbers of the invaders was too much for him and his men, although the day previous he had written a defiant note to General Kearney offering battle. It was about noon when the Americans reached the mouth of the canyon, every man in the ranks eager to try the mettle of the Mexicans. Emory thus describes the scene:

“The sun shone with dazzling brightness; the guidons and colors of each squádrón, regiment, and battalion were for the first time unfurled. The drooping horses seemed to take courage from the gay array. The trumpeters sounded ‘to horse’ with spirit, and the hills multiplied and reëchoed the call. All wore the aspect of a gala day. About the middle of the day’s march the two Pueblo Indians, previously sent to sound the chief men of that formidable tribe, were seen in the distance at full speed, with arms and legs both thumping the sides of their mules at every stride. Something was now surely in the wind. The smaller and foremost of the two dashed up to the general, his face radiant with joy, and exclaimed: ‘They are in the canyon, my brave; pluck up your courage and push them out.’”

But they were not there; already the boasting Mexican army had faded away; rent by quarrels and fear, and bearing their commander with them, all had fled to the mountains for safety. Forbes adds:

“As we approached the ancient town of Pecos, a large fat fellow, mounted on a mule, came toward us at full speed, and, extending his hand to the general, congratulated him on the ar-



## THE GREAT PLAINS

rival of himself and army. He said, with a roar of laughter, 'Armijo and his troops have gone to hell, and the canyon is all clear.' "

Thus easily was New Mexico won without bloodshed, and the centuries-long Spanish influence on the Great Plains swept away forever. The waves of war passed on to the south and west beyond the limits of this region whose story is being now considered. With Doniplan's hardships and sufferings in the mountains, and Kearney's wonderful march across Arizona to California, we have nothing to do. When Armijo fled from the country it became the undisputed property of the United States, and the conquest of New Mexico was practically ended.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE REIGN OF THE PRAIRIE SCHOONER

#### Increase of Santa Fe Trade

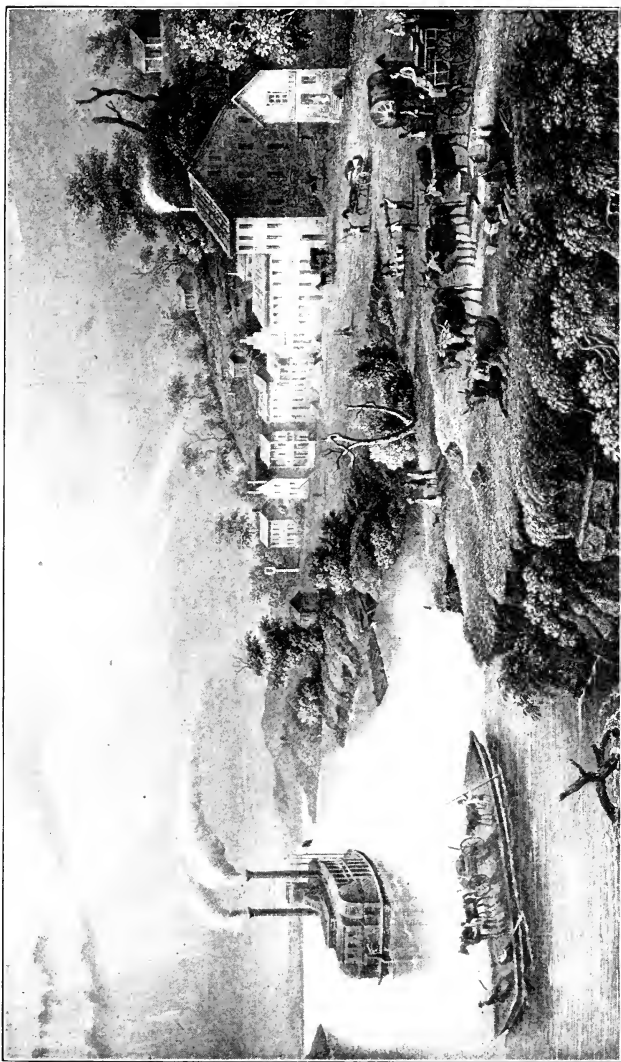
**T**HE close of the Mexican war brought with it a new era to the Plains. The reign of the prairie schooner then began in earnest. Almost immediately the freight business between Missouri River points and Santa Fe increased to a wonderful degree. Where before a yearly caravan was deemed sufficient for the trade, from now on, during the season of safe travel, the trail was seldom vacant of slow-toiling wagons. Wages for teamsters rose steadily, although prices for transportation had a marked tendency downward because of increasing competition. However, profits were sufficient, even taking into account the growing hostility of the Indian tribes, and the consequent danger of the passage. The usual price charged for thus hauling freight to Santa Fe was ten dollars a hundred pounds, each wagon earning from five hundred to six hundred dollars every trip, the average time consumed being eighty or ninety days. About this time the eastern terminus of the trade shifted to a considerable degree from Independence to Westport, and Kansas City began her steady advance toward supremacy.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

### The Rush of Gold-Seekers over the Oregon Trail

During this period the Oregon Trail was not neglected, but was being constantly traversed by emigrant trains bound for the Columbia River country of California. But by the Spring of 1849, when the gold rush began, this slender current became suddenly transformed into a mighty torrent. In all the chronicles of men there is nothing to compare with the stream of humanity which then began flowing across an unconquered wilderness. No one may even guess at the numbers involved. There are no statistics to turn to. It has been roughly estimated that in that first year alone forty-two thousand people crossed the Plains. Lummis, in a remarkable article on Pioneer Transportation, in McClure's Magazine, from whom I quote freely in this chapter, pictures this exodus in these powerful words:

"In its pathless distance, its inevitable hardships, and its frequent savage perils, reckoned with the character of the men, women, and children concerned, it stands alone. The era was one of national hard times; and not only the professional failures, but ministers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, and farmers, with their families, caught the new yellow fever, and betook themselves to a journey fifty times as long and hard as the average of them had ever taken before. Powder, lead, food-stuffs, household goods, wives, sisters, mothers, and babies rode in the Osna-burg-sheeted prairie schooners, or whatsoever wheeled conveyance the emigrant could secure, up from ancient top-buggies to new Conestogas; while the men rode their horses or mules, or trudged beside the caravans. A historic party of five Frenchmen pushed a hand-wagon from the Missouri to the Coast; and one man trundled his possessions in a wheelbarrow. At its best, it was an itinerary untranslatable to the present generation; at



AN EARLY SCENE AT KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI



## REIGN OF THE PRAIRIE SCHOONER

its worst, with Indian massacres, thirst, snows, tenderfootedness, and disease, it was one of the ghastliest highways in history. The worst chapter of cannibalism in our national record was that of the Donner Party, snowed in from November to March, 1849-50 in the Sierra Nevada. In the fifties the Asiatic cholera crawled in upon the Plains, and like a gray wolf followed the wagon-trains from the River to the Rockies. In the height of the migration, from four thousand to five thousand immigrants died of this pestilence; and if there was a half-mile which the Indians had failed to punctuate with a grave, the cholera took care to remedy the omission. The two-thousand-mile trip was a matter of four months when least, and of six with bad luck. Children were born, and people died; worried greenhorns quarrelled and killed one another — and the train straggled on. Up on the head-waters of the Platte one probably could find, even now, the crumbling remnants of a little cottonwood scaffold, and of her rocking chair, which was left upon it to mark the grave of a mother who gave up her life there to the birth of a child later not unknown in the history of California. On the southern route—through New Mexico and Arizona—Commissioner Bartlett took cognizance of one hundred deserted wagons. Already in the summer of 1849, 1,500 wagons, bound for 'Californy,' crossed the Missouri at St. Joe alone in six weeks. In 1850, Kirkpatrick counted 459 west-bound teams in nine miles."

### Freight Traffic to the Pacific in the Sixties

In the rear of this immense emigrant traffic there immediately sprang up a vast freighting interest, which at this day seems almost incredible. We can but roughly estimate its importance. We know this, that during the sixties five hundred heavily laden wagons frequently passed Fort Kearney in a single day. In 1865, within six weeks, six thousand wagons filled with freight rolled past that isolated post on the Overland Trail. Frank A. Root, about that time an express messenger, who later

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published an interesting volume, "The Overland Stage to California," records that in a single day's ride between Fort Kearney and old Julesburg, he counted 888 west-bound wagons, drawn by 10,650 oxen, horses, and mules. In illustrating the slowness of this mode of travel, Root, starting one day from Atchison on his stage, spoke to a bull-whacker who was just pulling out. Root went through to Denver, and doubled back, meeting his friend on the road. This experience was repeated again and again, the express messenger seeing the bull-whacker for the last time as he rolled into Denver. Root had accomplished five single trips, having covered 3,265 miles, with eighteen days' lay over, while the freighter had wheeled slowly 653 miles.

Freighting across the Plains attained to its greatest magnitude during and for a short time after the Civil War, from 1863 to 1866, but during the entire decade from 1859 to 1869 it was of immense proportions. The major portion of it was carried on along the mainly used trails to Santa Fe and California, but the minor trails, soon established, and leading from post to post scattered throughout the Indian country, were often traversed by freighters in Government employ. In such cases small detachments of troops, commonly riding in an ambulance drawn by mules, accompanied the lumbering wagons as escort. These found many a bit of strenuous service to perform in bringing their charges safely through. On the long trails, however, the hardy wagoners had to rely upon their

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own ready rifles to assure their passage, and usually travelled in long trains, under a rude yet effective discipline. It was sure to be a long, tedious trip, but usually contained sufficient incident to relieve the dull routine. During all the later years the Indian tribes were restless and dangerous, seldom venturing on open attack, but always seeking opportunity to run off stock, or dash down upon a loitering wagon, or a straying hunter. This hostility of the savages can be traced back to the reckless barbarism of the teamsters themselves. The Santa Fe Trail became a trail of blood, yet it was peaceful enough until wanton shooting of Indians by whites compelled the tribes to retaliate. In the earliest days an unarmed man could have walked in safety the entire distance. In the height of the freighting enterprise oxen were more commonly used than any other animals. They made from twelve to fifteen miles a day with loaded wagons, and averaged twenty miles when returning light. With good care oxen covered two thousand miles during the usual season of Plains travel, extending from April to November.

### The Teamster and the Indian

As well illustrating the constant danger hovering over careless stragglers, a reminiscence related by General Forsyth of an incident that occurred during the construction of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, is apropos. It is thus related in "The Story of the Soldier":

"On one occasion, near the Smoky Hill River in Colorado,



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five or six of the teamsters during nooning hour on a hot mid-summer day, despite positive orders to the contrary, strayed over toward the river bank, a good quarter of a mile away, and dropped down in the shade of a solitary cottonwood tree that grew there. In a few moments a well-mounted war party of eight or ten Cheyennes, who were lying concealed in the river bottom just under a cut bank on this side of the river, suddenly dashed out and made for them. But one of the party had any arms, and he had only a revolver. In a moment the Indians were upon them, and the men, running for their lives, started toward the railroad, while the soldiers, grasping their rifles, ran to their rescue, opening fire on the Indians as they ran. Two of the teamsters were shot down and scalped, but the man with the revolver kept his head, and by threatening the nearest warriors caused them to sheer off as they closed on him, and the soldiers getting within range soon made it so hot for them that they fled. One of the men, however, a long-legged Missourian teamster, had been headed off on his way to the track by an enterprising warrior, who sought to run him down and transfix him with a spear after he had failed to hit him with a rifle shot. This teamster happened to have had a new leather-thonged bull whip issued to him that day, and having some misgivings as to whether he would find it in his wagon on his return from his dinner, had, fortunately for himself, taken it with him when he and his companions sought their noon siesta under the cottonwood tree. Running for dear life, he unconsciously held the whip in his hand, and just as the Indian was upon him, and about to transfix him by hurling his spear, he glanced over his shoulder and almost instinctively made a backward cut with his whip at the Indian's pony, the lash striking the animal full in the face. The horse swerved so suddenly as to divert the warrior's aim, and, though he hurled the missile, the spear missed its mark, and as the pony dashed close by him our teamster saw his only chance.

"Grasping the tail of the now frightened and fleeing animal, he began a hail of strokes on the bare back of the Indian that only one who has seen the way in which a Western bullwhacker can handle a blacksnake whip can fully appreciate. Every stroke drew blood, and the teamster rained down the blows unsparingly and savagely.

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"In vain did the Indian cower to his pony's back, and dig his heels into his sides, and lash the animal desperately with his quirt, for the teamster held on like grim death as he ran, and plied his strokes swiftly and unerringly, and it was not until he was exhausted with running and stumbled over a hillock that the Indian's pony broke loose, and, with a parting cut of the teamster's whip across his hind legs, tore madly away toward the other warriors, who, fearing the aim of the soldiers, and not daring to come to his rider's rescue, were galloping wildly around just out of rifle range, whooping, laughing, and yelling with delight at the absurd plight of the discomfited brave, who, it is safe to say, from henceforth, until he had managed to rehabilitate himself by some daring deed of blood, would be dubbed and held only as a squaw in the Indians' camp. As for our long-legged Missouri teamster he was the hero of the hour, and deserved to be."

### Immense Traffic at the Outfitting Points

It has been estimated that while the reign of the prairie schooner was at its zenith, the floating population on the Great Plains amounted to fully 250,000. In 1865 more than twenty-one million pounds of freight was thus conveyed westward from Atchison alone, and to transport it 4,917 wagons were required, with 6,164 mules, 27,685 oxen, and 1,256 men. Yet this was but a drop in the bucket as compared with the traffic at the numerous other outfitting points along the border. The firms engaged in this business were many, and their employees an army. From Fort Smith, Independence, Kansas City, St. Joseph, Atchison, Council Bluffs, and other less known points of departure, the great wagon streams swept forth into the Plains, their aggregate number beyond any possible estimate of to-day. The greatest firm in the trade, that of

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Russell, Majors, and Waddell, at one time employed 6,250 huge wagons, and 75,000 oxen. As Lummis says:

“Probably there are not to-day so many oxen working in the United States as this one firm used half a century ago. This may give some faint idea of the mighty traffic whose wheels wrinkled the face of the Far West, and the smoke of whose dusty torments ‘ascended up forever,’ and reddened the prairie sunsets for a generation.”

### The Organization of a Freight Caravan

For a moment consider the organization of such a train and its cost. Usually not less than twenty-five wagons travelled together for better protection. They were huge, long-g geared prairie schooners, flaring from the bottom upward, sometimes seventeen feet long, with six feet depth of hold, and a capacity of anywhere from five thousand to sixteen thousand pounds each. Over all, upheld by stout hickory bows was the canvas cover. From six to twelve yoke of oxen furnished the propelling power, under the inspiration of one or more “bull-whackers.” The men travelling with such a caravan numbered thirty-one—a captain, or wagonmaster, his assistant, a night herder, and the “cavayard driver,” or in Spanish *caballada*, who had charge of the spare horses, with, at least a driver to each wagon. Of the latter those handling oxen, or “bull teams” were known as “bull-whackers,” while the others, devoting their energy and profanity to the steering of long-eared “critters,” were denominated “mule-skinners,” and each class well deserved its name. The trail was never

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noted for sentimentality, or mercy to dumb beasts. In the last years of prairie freighting, after 1859, "trailers" were quite commonly used. The trailer was a second, and generally a smaller wagon, chained to the one in the lead. The amount of money invested in such a wagon-train reached a surprising figure. The huge Conestoga, Pittsburg, or Pennsylvania wagons cost from eight hundred dollars to one thousand five hundred dollars each; first-class mules (and no others could do the work) five hundred dollars to one thousand dollars a pair; harness for the ten-mule team three hundred dollars to six hundred dollars, making a total running from \$2,600 to \$7,100 for each wagon. To this must be added salaries, provisions, and incidentals.

Regular freight caravans as thus constituted, and running west from the Missouri River, not only greatly stimulated emigration, but did much to lower the cost of transportation. In the days of the pack-train it was no uncommon thing to pay one dollar a pound per one hundred miles, or \$20 a ton per mile. The tariff of the overland freighters between Atchison and Denver (620 miles) is thus given by Lummis:

Flour . . . . .	9c	per lb.	Whiskey . . . . .	18c	per lb.
Sugar . . . . .	13½c	per lb.	Glass . . . . .	19½c	per lb.
Bacon and dry			Trunks . . . . .	25c	per lb.
goods . . . . .	15c	per lb.	Furniture . . . . .	31c	per lb.

Everything went by the pound, and the trip required twenty-one days for horses or mules, and five weeks for oxen.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OVERLAND ROUTE

The Oregon Trail Used by Trappers and Mormons

**L**ONG before the first coming of the white man to this magnificent domain of the West, the beautiful valley of the Platte had been used as a natural pathway leading to the mountains. The pioneer trappers and traders soon discovered its feasibility and were travelling this route in the earliest years of the nineteenth century. Pushing on still farther toward the setting sun in their eager search after furs, these hardy wanderers conquered the secrets of the grim ranges beyond, connecting the more easily accessible crossings of the mountains and deserts, until by 1843, there was a well-defined, and continuous route of travel, passable even for wagons, stretching in unbroken line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean at the mouth of the Columbia. This later became known widely as the Oregon Trail.

At first its eastern terminus was the mouth of the Platte; before serious emigration or settlement began, this terminus had shifted southward, but the entire Platte Valley was always utilized to a considerable extent. In 1842 Lieutenant Frémont, on his first exploring expedition, travelled up the valley of the Blue, thus opening a practical and easy trail from the outfitting stations of western Missouri to

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Grand Island. The Mormon exodus of 1847 journeyed the full length of the Platte Valley, but the later emigrants to Oregon, as well as the California gold-seekers, preferred the shorter route across the prairies of Kansas and Nebraska. The Platte Valley is wide and beautiful, once covered with luxuriant grass and dotted with wild flowers. About it in those old days stretched a desert of plain and prairie awful in its loneliness, and roamed over by treacherous savages. The river itself was broad but shallow, at some seasons almost disappearing in the sand. Three-quarters of a century ago Washington Irving spoke of it as —

“the most magnificent and most useless of streams. Abstraction made of its defects, nothing can be more pleasing than the perspective which it presents to the eye. Its islands have the appearance of a labyrinth of groves floating on the waters. Their extraordinary position gives an air of youth and loveliness to the whole scene. If to this be added the undulations of the river, the waving of the verdure, the alternations of light and shade, the succession of these islands varying in form and beauty, and the purity of the atmosphere, some idea may be formed of the pleasing sensations which the traveller experiences on beholding a scene that seems to have started fresh from the hands of the Creator.”

### Difficulty of Tracing the Road Now

Any tracing of the old Oregon, or Overland Trail, can be only approximate, owing to the many changes wrought by settlement. Most of the old road has long since been ploughed up, and, although many names of places famous in the olden days yet survive, they are rarely located in the original spots. Yet once it was all plain enough, for as the inflow

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of emigration rapidly increased, the road became so deeply worn that frequently new ones were found necessary, and thus, from one cause and another, there were often parallel lines for considerable distances. Sometimes only a few feet separated the trails, and again they swerved away from each other for several miles. It was a wonderful highway, perhaps the most remarkable in history. Every mile of it had been a scene of hardship and suffering, of battle and sudden death, of high purpose and stern determination. Nowhere else in the world—not even in Siberia—was there ever so long a highway across which population and traffic moved in continuous journey from one end to the other. In all that immense distance the earlier travellers beheld no evidence of civilized habitation between Independence and Fort Vancouver, excepting four small trading-posts. For two thousand miles it stretched away through an utter wilderness; as Chittenden says, “No transit ever located a foot of it, no level established its grades, no engineer sought out the fords, built any bridges, or surveyed the mountain passes.” Yet Father De Smet, who had seen all Europe, pronounced it one of the finest highways in the world.

Nevertheless it was not always so. It was not when heavy rains transformed it into a quagmire, or when the prairies became dry and parched,—

“the road filled with stifling dust, the stream beds mere dry ravines, or carrying only alkaline water which could not be used, the game all gone to more hospitable sections, and the summer

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sun pouring down its heat with torrid intensity. It was then that the trail became a highway of desolation, strewn with abandoned property, the skeletons of horses, mules, and oxen, and, alas! too often with freshly made mounds and head-boards that told the pitiful tale of sufferings too great to be endured. If the trail was the scene of romance, adventure, pleasure, and excitement, so it was marked in every mile of its course by human misery, tragedy, and death.”<sup>1</sup>

To be caught upon the trail during the winter months, when blizzards were common, was a most desperate and dangerous situation for both man and beast.

The Trail, in many places a hundred feet or more wide, running directly across the open Plains, presented a most astonishing sight when first viewed. The Indians called it the “Great Medicine Road of the Whites,” and were profoundly impressed with the vast multitude swarming along it. Captain Raynolds, of the Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, came south from the Yellowstone in 1859, and struck the Trail near the first ford of the North Platte. Never having seen the great road he innocently asked his guide, Jim Bridger, if there was any danger of their crossing the Trail *without seeing it*. Bridger’s only answer was a look of contemptuous amazement.

### Prominent Points on the Route

The majority of the Rocky Mountain, Columbia, and California expeditions started from Independence, Missouri. Leaving that border town the

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<sup>1</sup> Chittenden.



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route followed the old Santa Fe Trail for about two days' journey, the last camping-ground being at Round or Caravan Grove, thirty-three miles from Independence. Eight miles beyond this a rough signboard stood pointing to the right; on it were the words "Road to Oregon." Never before or since has so simple an announcement pointed the way to so long and hard a journey. It was at this point the two great historic trails of the Plains diverged, and this important junction was a little northwest of the present town of Gardner, Kansas.

Mention need be made only briefly of the more prominent points beyond this, usually camping spots, which were utilized, a little later, as stations for the Overland stages or the Pony Express. The first of these was Wakarusa Creek. The ford was near where the railroad running south from Lawrence now crosses the stream. From this point the trail followed the divide between the Wakarusa and the Kansas, until it swerved down to the latter river at what was then known as Papin's Ferry, being about the present location of the city of Topeka. The next stop was on Turkey Creek, near the town now known as Rossville, the traveller being by this time ninety-five miles from Independence. The Little Vermilion was attained close to the site of the modern Louisville; and the Big, or Black Vermilion, about where the present Bigelow stands.

One hundred and seventy-four miles from Independence the caravan arrived at the Big Blue. The stream was forded near the mouth of the Little

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Blue, and, eight miles beyond, close to the present location of Ballard Falls, a junction was made with a trail leading from St. Joseph, about one hundred miles distant. From Wythe's Creek, some twenty miles farther on, the road ran along the Little Blue, finally crossing the Big Sandy near its mouth. This is now Nebraska; the trail cut across a bend in the Little Blue, and came down close to the banks of that stream once more a few miles northwest of Hebron, Nebraska. At the head of the Little Blue, close to the present village of Leroy, and two hundred and ninety-six miles from Independence, the trail passed into the valley of the Platte. Approaching this river the traveller came upon a range of low hills built up by the winds from the drifting sands. They were known on the Trail as the "Coasts of the Platte." Here the river was a wide, muddy stream, with low banks, flat sand-bars, and pygmy islands, straggling through the prairie, and, Inman says, "only saved from being impossible to find with the naked eye by its sentinel trees standing at long distances from each other on either side." The valley at this point was about seven miles wide, and the bed of the river between one and two miles from bank to bank.

### The Story of Brady Island

It was twenty miles below the head of Grand Island that the old Trail swept down into the valley. In early days this island was densely wooded, and extended for over sixty miles. From here the Trail followed the stream up to the junction of the

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North and South Forks. On the way only two points of special interest need be referred to — Wood and Brady Islands. The first of these was a noted landmark and camping spot, and is now a station on the Union Pacific. The story of how Brady Island became so named is thus told by Rufus Sage, and quoted by Chittenden :

“In 1863 a party of trappers was descending the Platte in a boat heavily laden with furs. Brady and a companion had quarrelled a good deal *en route*, and remained very bitter toward each other. While in camp on the island the other members of the party went out to hunt, leaving Brady and his enemy to guard the boat. Upon their return they found Brady dead, having been killed, according to his companion's statement, by the accidental discharge of his own gun. The party doubted the truth of the story, but could not disprove it. They resumed their journey after burying Brady, but were soon compelled by the shallow water to take to the shore. Becoming destitute of provisions, they separated, and started for the settlements, each man by himself. The night after the separation the suspected murderer was trying to light a fire by the discharge of his pistol, in order to drive off mosquitoes, when in some way he discharged it into his own thigh, inflicting a dangerous wound. He lay there in agony for six days, when he was found by some Pawnee Indians and taken to the lodge of a chief. Here he lingered for a few days and died. Before he died he confessed to the murder of Brady.”

### Points on the Forks of the Platte

The Lower Ford of the South Platte was 117 miles from where the Trail first entered the valley at Grand Island, and 433 miles from Independence. A few of the emigrants and freighters crossed here, moving out into a slender tongue of land lying between the two Forks, but the majority preferred to

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keep on along the main Trail for sixty-three miles farther until they came to the Upper Ford of the South Platte. Here one trail turned off to the southwest, following the stream, and led to Bent's Fort on the Arkansas, and thence to Taos and Santa Fe. But the main route forded the river and struck across to Ash Hollow, where it came out upon the banks of the North Fork. The Trail soon began passing through a section where huge rocks were numerous, formed into fantastic shapes, which received appropriate names from the earlier explorers. Among these were Court House Rock, 555 miles from Independence, and Chimney Rock, sixteen miles beyond. This last was in the form of a cylindrical tower rising from the top of a conical hill. Rufus Sage, in 1841, estimated that the hill was 300 feet high and the tower 200. According to recent observations this estimate is excessive. Forty-five miles beyond this point the travellers came to another famous landmark known as Scott's Bluffs. The origin of the name has been told in the chapter upon the early fur-traders. About half-way between Chimney Rock and Scott's Bluffs the road bore away from the river, but at this point returned to it again.

### From the Plains into the Mountains

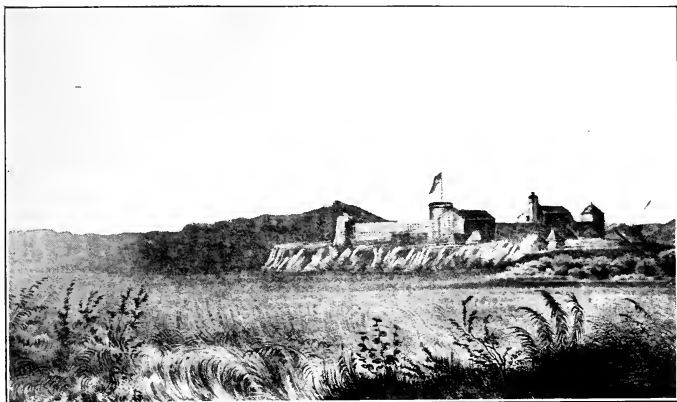
Horse Creek, 630 miles from Independence, was the next camping place; and, thirty-seven miles beyond, the wagons rolled up to the banks of Laramie River, and the wearied emigrants took a resting

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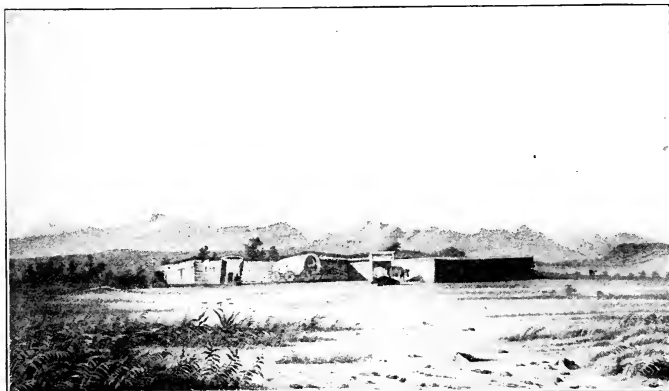
spell at Fort John, or later, Fort Laramie, one of the old time trading-posts, the first human habitation to be reached in all that long journey. This river received its name from a French-Canadian trapper, Joseph Laramie, who lost his life on its banks in 1821. Here it was customary for the emigrant trains to go into camp and refit for the harder mountain travelling ahead, as the next place where they could buy material and find workmen was at Fort Bridger, 394 miles distant. Leaving Laramie, the emigrants finally departed from the Plains and entered upon the mountains, and consequently there is no necessity of our following the Trail further. But wearisome as the slow journey has already been, the pioneers have not as yet half-way completed their route to the Pacific at the mouth of the Columbia. Ahead of them the old Trail stretched across mountain and desert for 1,353 miles.

### Sufferings of the Early Emigrants

And oh, the men, the women, the children who completed it! Who starved, suffered, and agonized, yet marched ever forward in misery; who faced the burning heat, the stifling dust, the dead monotony of the Plains, the snows and perils of the mountains, the awful desolation of the deserts, yet with undaunted hearts pressed sternly on! The long miles, the skulking savages, the rude fare, the nights beneath desert stars, the days under the burning sun, the never ceasing toil, the constant sense of danger, only served to develop the manhood and womanhood of these



FORT LARAMIE



FORT BRIDGER

FRONTIER FORTS



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representatives of an iron age. Before them ever was the Star of Hope, and in their heroic hearts faith never faltered. They crossed a continent, threading a barren wilderness, to win for civilization a region mighty enough for an empire. They did their work, and they did it well. And those others who died upon the way, who sank beneath privation and despair, who fell beneath the Indian tomahawk or the grim clutch of disease—their lonely graves, unmarked, unknown, strew the route of the old Trail from end to end. They were the martyrs of progress. As soldiers they fell in the front rank.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE OVERLAND STAGE LINES

Monthly Stages to Santa Fe

**F**OLLOWING the slow-moving prairie schooner there soon came the far swifter stage-coach, conveying passengers, express matter, and mail. As early as 1849 the first experiment was made in this effort to achieve a more rapid passage across the Plains, a line of monthly stages being placed between Independence and Santa Fe. "The Missouri Commonwealth," of a few months later, has this description:

"We briefly alluded some days since to the Santa Fe line of mail stages which left this city on its first monthly journey on the first instant. The stages are got up in elegant style, and are each arranged to convey eight passengers. The bodies are beautifully painted, and made water-tight, with a view of using them as boats in ferrying streams. The team consists of six mules to each coach. The mail is guarded by eight men, armed as follows: Each man has at his side, fastened in the stage, one of Colt's revolving rifles; in a holster below, one of Colt's long revolvers; and in his belt a small Colt's revolver, besides a hunting knife; so that these eight men are ready in case of attack to discharge one hundred and thirty-six shots without having to reload. This is equal to a small army, armed as in the ancient times; and from the looks of this escort, ready as they are either for offensive or defensive warfare with the savages, we have no fears for the safety of the mails."

These monthly stages to Santa Fe started from each end of the route at the same time; as the demand for transportation increased it grew to a

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weekly service, then to three times each week, and in the early sixties, daily stages were established, and continued until the completion of the railroad. Those were indeed times of romance and adventure, and every mile of the way had its story worth the telling. In the days of its greatness each coach was capable of transporting eleven passengers, nine closely stowed inside, three on a seat, and two on the outside with the driver. The fare to Santa Fe was two hundred and fifty dollars, baggage allowance being limited to forty pounds. Board *en route* was, of course, included, but that was of the simplest, being usually bacon, hardtack, and coffee, with beans occasionally as a luxury. Every trip was certain to result in some interesting incident; sometimes, and not infrequently, an Indian raid, or perhaps a stampede of the mules, or a serious breakdown. When such happenings failed to materialize there was often the playfulness of drunken drivers to be reckoned with, and the possibility of an upset while travelling at full speed.

When everything went well, the trip required about two weeks of constant travel. The first night and day in a crowded coach were most fatiguing, but after that the intense weariness appeared to wear away, and the journey was continued in comparative comfort. Whatever sleep was had could be enjoyed only while sitting bolt upright, and hanging to the straps. At first the teams were changed every twenty miles; later, when faster time was sought, every ten miles. Small stations were erected

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along the route, and the men on duty there had many a brush with Indians; in such cases the arriving stages frequently found only ashes and dead bodies waiting to greet them. The conductor, or messenger as he was called, went through with the coach to Santa Fe, but the drivers were changed eight times in that distance. Occasionally an escort of soldiers, under a non-commissioned officer, riding in a six-mule army wagon, would accompany the stage through a specially hostile region, but generally the travellers were compelled to rely upon their own resources for safety.

### The First Transcontinental Stage Line

Shortly after this opening of a stage line to Santa Fe, a monthly service was inaugurated between Independence and Salt Lake, a distance of twelve hundred miles. It was not successful but continued to transport mails and an occasional passenger, for four years. In 1854 the Government felt the necessity of a direct mail line to the Pacific Coast, and voted the sum of \$80,000 per annum for that purpose. The contractors ran monthly stages from Missouri, via Albuquerque, to Stockton, California. This effort never paid: during the nine months of experiment, the receipts were only \$1,255. Yet, because it was south of the greatest danger from snow, this was the route selected for the operating of the first great transcontinental stage line, that known as Butterfield's "Southern Overland Mail." It ran 2,759 miles, from St. Louis, via El

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Paso, Yuma, and Los Angeles, to San Francisco, and was probably the longest continuous run ever operated. For this tremendous distance, over plains, deserts, and mountains, its accomplished schedule time was at first twenty-five days; later it was reduced to twenty-three. Its record run was twenty-one days. The coaches of this pioneer Overland started at the same time, September 15, 1858, from St. Louis and San Francisco. At their safe arrival at those distant terminals on schedule time, they received a mighty ovation. The rate of fare for the full distance was a hundred dollars gold, and letters cost ten cents per half ounce.

The establishment of such a line was a business enterprise of much magnitude and risk. It involved peril with every mile of the distance, and the possibility of loss with each turn of the wheels. The complete equipment consisted of more than one hundred Concord coaches, 1,000 horses, 500 mules, and 750 men, of whom 150 were drivers. The monthly schedule soon became semi-weekly, and finally six times a week the laden stages rolled out on their long trips. Lummis writes:

"The deadly deserts through which nearly half its route lay, the sand-storm, the mirage, the hell of thirst, the dangerous Indian tribes, and its vast length — forty per cent greater than that of any other stage line in our national story — made it a monumental undertaking; and the name of John Butterfield deserves to be remembered along with those Americans who helped to win the West."

This "Southern Overland" was operated with scarcely a break in regularity until the commence-

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ment of the Civil War. That conflict rendered impossible the longer carrying of the mail so far south, and necessitated the Overland being transferred to a more northern and shorter route, where drivers and passengers must brave the peril of the mountain snow. The "Central" line was selected for the new route; the first stages to travel its two thousand miles left St. Joseph and Placerville simultaneously, on July 1, 1861, and each completed the journey on the eighteenth.

### Abe Majors, Stage Line Operator

This new adventure in travel brought into prominence other leaders in Western transportation. Russell, Majors, and Waddell, and Ben Holladay were the most famous, and among them all Holladay and Majors are worthy of special mention. Abe Majors would have been a remarkable character anywhere; on the Plains he was unique. A Kentucky Christian who never drank, never swore, and who compelled his drivers to sign an iron-clad contract to be equally abstemious under penalty of being "fired" without pay, he was for years one of the truly picturesque figures of the frontier. He was, besides, a wonderful operator, and organized a business of vast proportions. His Merchants' Express was, in that age, the largest commercial transportation enterprise ever organized under one administration, and his "bull teams" were on every trail between the Missouri and the Rockies. When he was a young man himself, and a "bull-whacker," he made

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the "Broadhorn" record on the Santa Fe Trail, completing the round trip with oxen in ninety-two days. Later in life, when he took up Government contracts, he ran over 3,500 wagons in that service alone, employing 4,000 men, 1,000 mules, and more than 40,000 oxen. In addition to this Majors became also one of the two stage-line kings of the Plains. As Lummis puts it, "For debt, folly of his partners, or other reasons alien to his choice, in his own despite he became responsible head of more miles and harder miles, more animals and less 'gentled' ones, more Concord coaches and more 'kingwhips,' than any man before or since, save only Ben Holladay." Between Leavenworth and Denver he controlled a thousand mules and fifty coaches. The first of these to reach the Colorado town arrived May 17, 1859, making the 665-mile trip in six days. Among the passengers on this pioneer "Hoss-power Pullman" were Horace Greeley, Henry Villard, and Albert D. Richardson. On the overland route between St. Joe and Salt Lake a stage line had been operated, after a fashion, by the firm of Hockaday and Liggett. In 1858 their semi-monthly trips averaged twenty-two days. When Majors got hold he cut the twelve-hundred-mile run to ten days, and operated a daily coach. The difficulty and peril of such achievements is made manifest when we remember that from Denver to Salt Lake there was not a single town, hamlet, or house for six hundred miles.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

Ben Holladay

In 1859, counting the Panama Steamer, there were six established mail routes to California. But Ben Holladay was King. A historian of this era says:

"No other one man anywhere has owned and managed a transportation system at once so vast and so difficult. He had sixteen first-class passenger steamers plying the Pacific from San Francisco to Oregon, Panama, Japan, and China. At the height of his overland business he operated nearly 5,000 miles of daily mail-stages, with about 500 coaches and express wagons, 500 freight wagons, 5,000 horses and mules, and a host of oxen."

The figures connected with this far-reaching enterprise are almost beyond present comprehension. On the main line between St. Joe and San Francisco there were used 100 Concord coaches, drawn by 2,750 horses and mules. The sum of \$55,000 was expended for harness alone, while the feed bill approximated a million dollars yearly. It has been officially stated that \$2,425,000 was expended the first twelve months in equipment and operating expenses. The Government paid Holladay at this time a million a year in mail contracts; but the cost of provisions for animals was immense, grain going to twenty-five cents a pound, and hay selling as high as \$125 a ton. The greatness of the demand is evidenced by the fact that in one day an agent in St. Louis contracted for seven Missouri River steamers to load with corn for the army of mules and horses employed.

# THE OVERLAND STAGE LINES

Wells, Fargo & Co.

Holladay's reign as King lasted for five years, beginning in December, 1861. It was brought to a close by the disastrous raids of the Plains Indians during the time of trouble 1864-66, when his stage-line was crippled, nearly all his stations for four hundred miles being burned, his stock stolen and his employees killed. The actual loss inflicted was above half a million. This disaster forced him into selling in November, 1866, to Wells, Fargo & Co. The main operations of this latter firm, long known throughout the West, and to the present day, as "Wells, Fargo," occurred later than the limits covered by this work, yet was of such importance as to justify the quoting of Lummis's words regarding its history:

"It not only covers more ground than any other carrier; it is the inventor of the shotgun messenger, and the only express company by which wives and babies were ever way-billed two thousand miles through a country of hostile Indians. No other company has transported so much treasure; and its reports are as indispensable to the student of mining statistics as those of the Director of the Mint."

## Achievements in Passenger Transportation

But to resume Ben Holladay's wonderful record. Some of the driving done on his line probably surpassed any other recorded in the history of staging, and the most rapid trips were always accomplished while he rode in the coach. The ordinary schedule from Salt Lake to Atchison, twelve



## THE GREAT PLAINS

hundred miles, was eleven days, but on one occasion it was covered in eight days and six hours. From Placerville, California, to Atchison, which in the regular run required seventeen days, the distance being 1,913 miles, a trip was made by Holladay in twelve days and two hours. This achievement aroused the enthusiasm of the entire country, and was a big advertisement for his line, although it is believed to have cost over twenty thousand dollars in wear and tear of animals and rolling stock.

When one considers the lonely, dangerous country through which this long road ran, the isolated stations, the expense of equipment, the difficulty of transporting supplies, the rates charged for overland travel were comparatively low. The old Butterfield fare of one hundred dollars for 2,759 miles almost, if not quite, equals present railroad rates; and the Holladay tariff cannot be considered excessive. Up to 1863 the fare charged from the Missouri River to Placerville, including meals, was \$225. Toward the close of the Civil War, partly on account of heavy losses from Indian raids, the cost began to soar, and the 620 miles to Denver necessitated an expenditure of \$175. Lummis states that it once reached \$350, or fifty-four cents a mile, with meals extra. The tariff for express over this route at that time was one dollar a pound. During this reign of high prices \$600 was paid for coach passage through to Placerville, the baggage allowance being limited to twenty-five pounds.

## THE OVERLAND STAGE LINES

The era of the overland stage from the Missouri to the Pacific covered about eight years, beginning with the Fall of 1858. It was filled with wonderful achievements, with desperate encounters, with strange adventures in the wilderness. In difficulties overcome and dangers conquered, this struggle against hardships and savagery is without parallel in the history of transportation. It is to be hoped that sometime, and that soon, some delver among the records may give to the world the detailed story of those days and nights upon plains, deserts, and mountains. It is an Iliad worthy of its Homer. As one has already written:

"It took Men to 'run,' and Men to journey in, the stages of that generation. The messengers in charge of express and mail on the main line of the Overland had a steady run of six days and nights without taking off their clothes. As for the drivers, there is no question that they were, as a class, the best whips in history. Hank Monk (whom Horace Greeley made famous), Keno Armstrong, Jack Gilmer, Billy Opdike, Enoch Cummings, and others—those were the mightiest jehus that ever 'pushed on the reins,' or 'sent 'em' down the Rockies or the Sierra Nevada. They were generic heroes of the song not yet forgotten when I was young, 'The High Salaried Driver of the Denver City Line.' So far as I am aware, the record single run was that made by Keno Armstrong, who drove 610 miles in 110 hours without sleep, straight-away."

In considering such achievements in passenger transportation it must be remembered that these results were accomplished over roads seldom, if ever, touched by either the spade or the plough. The old coaches pounded straight ahead over unbroken prairie, and across the dead level of the Plain; they

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forded rivers, they climbed mountains, they pitched headlong down the opposite slope, they skirted precipices, and swept over trackless deserts of shifting sand, more by the grace of God than any help of man. As one recalls all this, and reflects upon those leagues of desolation, the more the wonder grows, the deeper the respect for those who worked the miracle.

### The Concord Coach

Nor can we now dismiss this story out of the past without paying due honor to the vehicle which made such journey a possibility — that most famous of all coaches, the Concord. It was almost universally employed throughout the era of the stage-coach, and, for the purpose for which it was designed, it has never been surpassed. It was built in Concord, New Hampshire, by the Abbott-Downing Company, first established in 1813. They were mechanics, reliable and thorough, who built these coaches for plain and mountain, and their work was ever well done. The distinguishing characteristic of the Concord coach was that, instead of steel springs, the coach-body was swung on thorough braces of simple device enough, yet which resulted in the easiest riding carriage for all kinds of roads ever invented. This thorough brace was of stout leather, the strap ends firmly attached to C springs front and rear. The ordinary coach used upon the Overland would carry nine passengers inside, and one or two with the driver. The messenger hung on as best he could. Oftentimes both messenger and

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driver would be asleep while the six mules went spinning along eight or ten miles an hour. The former usually covered a distance of two hundred and fifty miles, while the latter had a shorter route, going constantly back and forth over the same stretch until, in the darkest night, he could unhesitatingly find his way.

The stage management was rigid in discipline. A special agent had absolute control over each division of about two hundred and fifty miles. He purchased horses, mules, harness, and food for men and animals, and his word was law. In fact he engaged and discharged men at pleasure, and ruled his section like an autocrat. The drivers were the most highly paid employees, receiving from \$150 to \$250 per month with board. Their wages were gauged according to difficulty of route and length of service. All classes of men were to be found in the drivers' seats, from college graduates to border desperadoes. The vast amount of money invested in this enterprise is shown by Holladay's sale to Wells, Fargo & Co. in 1866. The main line and branches brought one million five hundred thousand dollars in cash, and three hundred thousand dollars in Express Company stock. Yet this vast sum merely covered animals, rolling stock, stations, etc., and, in addition, the purchasers were to pay full value for hay, grain, and provisions on hand. These totalled nearly six hundred thousand dollars more.

## CHAPTER VII

### ADVENTURES AND TRAGEDIES ON THE OVERLAND

#### Sufferings from the Elements

THE Santa Fe Trail being the first used for staging purposes, was also the first to be reddened with blood, and to witness the hardships of prairie travel. From the earliest attempts accidents were frequent, and suffering from exposure to the elements was common. The terrible summer storms sweeping the level Plains, or driving desert sand in clouds, would delay the weary travellers for days in the utmost discomfort. Occasionally the eight frisky mules would prove too much for their driver, and there would be a runaway, and a broken coach, to be repaired with whatever tools might be at hand. In wet weather for mile after mile the passengers might be compelled to plod beside the wheels, laboriously prying them out of the clinging mud, and burdening the air with profanity. But in the mountain district to be traversed before reaching Santa Fe, the most serious disasters usually occurred during the winter. To be caught there by a raging snow-storm was certain to be a terrible experience. All that could be done, with the trail blotted completely from sight, was to wait the cessation of the storm. Passengers and employees had to crowd into the coach and use every effort to keep from freez-

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ing, and at the end often found themselves minus mules with which to complete the journey. Yet even more a summer hail-storm was to be dreaded, for nowhere else do such ice-chunks descend from the sky. Invariably such a storm meant a stampede of the mules, nor would a man dare to desert his shelter to seek them.

### A Massacre by Apaches

The first notable tragedy on the Santa Fe Trail in connection with stage coaching occurred almost with the first effort at establishing the line. It was a west-bound Concord, containing a full complement of passengers, including a Mr. White, his wife, child, and colored nurse. The journey was not an unpleasant one across the wide expanse of Plains. The Raton Range had been safely surmounted, and, just about dawn one morning, the heavy coach entered the canyon of the Canadian, its occupants unsuspecting of any danger. Instantly they were fiercely attacked by an ambushed party of Apaches under White Wolf. With scarcely any opportunity for defence, the unfortunate whites were shot down, scalped, and their mutilated bodies left upon the ground. Mrs. White, her child, and nurse were borne away prisoners. At Taos were several troops of the Second Dragoons under Major Greer. The story of this outrage did not reach them for nearly two weeks, but upon its receipt the Major at once started out on a hard winter campaign in hope of rescuing the captives. The soldiers had

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with them as guides several famous frontiersmen, Kit Carson, "Uncle Dick" Wooton, Joaquin Leroux, and Tom Tobin. The heavy snow made trailing almost impossible, yet the scouts discovered "signs," and, amid much suffering, followed the Indian trail for nearly four hundred miles, and finally located the village. Everything was made ready for a charge, when Major Greer suddenly decided to have a parley with the savages before commencing to fight. This decision not only greatly enraged the eager troopers, but gave the Indians ample time in which to prepare for action. They took full advantage of the opportunity, and poured in the first volley, Greer being struck in the breast, his life saved by a suspender buckle. This occurrence took from him all desire for further peace talk, and the fight was on. The troopers charged twice, killing and wounding more than a hundred Indians, but the chief escaped, and, when the soldiers finally captured the village, they found there the body of Mrs. White, yet warm, with three arrows in her breast. No trace of either the child or the colored nurse was ever found.

White Wolf was killed later by Lieutenant David Bell, Second Dragoons, in a most dramatic manner, and almost on the same spot where the murders had been perpetrated. While on a scout with his troop from Fort Union, New Mexico, Bell came upon White Wolf and an equal number of Apaches. A parley ensued, the controversy growing so heated that suddenly the two leaders ex-

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changed shots, the chief sinking on one knee to aim, and Bell throwing his body forward, and causing his horse to rear. Inman describes what followed:

"Both lines by command fired, following the example of their superiors, the troopers, however, spurring forward over their enemies. The warriors, or nearly all of them, threw themselves on the ground, and several vertical wounds were received by horse and rider. The dragoons turned short about, and again charged through and over their enemies, the fire being continuous. As they turned for a third charge, the surviving Indians were seen escaping to a deep ravine, which, although only one or two hundred paces off, had not previously been noticed. A number of the savages thus escaped, the troopers having to pull up at the brink, but sending a volley after the descending fugitives. In less than fifteen minutes twenty-one of the forty-six actors in this strange combat were slain or disabled. Bell was not hit, but four or five of his men were killed or wounded. He had shot White Wolf several times."

### Some Indian Leaders

In those early days of stage-coaching along the Santa Fe Trail the two most noted leaders of Indian raids were Santana (White Bear), a chief of the Kiowa nation, and Charles Bent, a half-breed desperado. In later years Kicking Bird, also a Kiowa, became the terror of the Plains. The latter was finally poisoned by a Mexican woman in 1876. Santana had his headquarters in what is now known as the Cheyenne Bottoms, eight miles from the Great Bend of the Arkansas, and about the same distance from old Fort Zarah. He was as cruel and heartless a savage as ever ambushed a stage-coach or murdered helpless women. For fifteen years he



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was the terror of the Trail, and his acts of atrocity were incessant. Charles Bent had for father the famous Colonel Bent, of Bent's Fort, but his mother was a Cheyenne squaw. Well educated in St. Louis, he no sooner returned to the Plains than he developed into a blood-thirsty desperado, organizing a body of young warriors, later known as "dog soldiers," and beginning a series of depredations against the whites. With over a hundred men under him he robbed ranches, and attacked wagon trains, coaches, and army caravans. The history of his bloody deeds will never be told, for dead men tell no tales, and seldom did Bent leave any alive after a raid. From Walnut Creek to the mountains no traveller was safe from attack by the "dog soldiers"; and oftentimes a caravan started forth having the disguised Bent as guide, for his plans usually involved treachery. The Government offered five thousand dollars for his capture, dead or alive, but death finally came to him in the form of malarial fever.

### Robbers, White and Red

Indian peril on the northern overland route, while never wholly absent, grew most serious during the period of the Civil War, when the Plains tribes became largely hostile. Road agents also became very much in evidence, and the robbery of stages was not uncommon. In July, 1865, a stage carrying seven passengers, and containing a considerable amount of gold bullion was the object of such an attack.

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The passengers were all old frontiersmen, and, anticipating a possible attempt at robbery, were prepared for a desperate defence. But treachery worked their ruin. Beside the driver, named Frank Williams, sat one of the robbers, thoroughly disguised. At a lonely spot this man suddenly shouted an alarm that the robbers were upon them. A shot was fired from beside the trail, and the men inside the coach instantly discharged their guns toward the supposed ambush. Immediately a regular volley was poured in from the opposite side; four of the passengers fell dead, another was severely wounded. Two men saved their lives; one feigning death in the bottom of the coach, the other escaping into the brush. The robbers secured over \$70,000, and it was later discovered that the driver, Williams, was an accomplice, and received his share. He was tracked to Denver, and hanged with very little ceremony.

In 1862 the Indian raids on the coaches and stations between Fort Laramie and South Pass were almost continuous. In April of that year occurred a terrible fight between the mail-stage and savages, on the Sweetwater. There were two coaches loaded with mail, and nine men, the leaders being Lem Flowers, a division agent, and the conductor named Brown. The Indians attacked at dawn, as was their custom, and the whites were compelled to run their coaches alongside each other, pile mail-sacks between the wheels, and throw sand over them for breastworks. Here they fought their assailants all

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day, six of the men being wounded, and all their stock driven off. A number of Indians were killed, and at night they withdrew, leaving the defenders to harness themselves to the running-gear, and thus draw their wounded comrades to safety. Another memorable raid was made all along the two hundred miles between Julesburg and Liberty Farm, at the head of the Little Blue, in August, 1864. Mail coaches, freight caravans, ranches, and parties putting up hay were attacked simultaneously. More than forty whites were killed, and the destruction of property was very large.

### Buffalo Bill as a Stage-Driver

The route lying along the North Platte became so dangerous that it was almost impossible to secure drivers even at the highest wages. W. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) was at this time a driver between Split Rock and Three Crossings, one of the most perilous sections. He had his full share of narrow escapes. Once he was set upon by a band of several hundred Sioux. A Division Agent named Flowers was on the box with him, and inside were half a dozen well-armed passengers. As soon as Cody got glimpse of the Indians, he handed the reins to Flowers, and began applying the whip. There followed a hot running fight, the passengers firing from the coach windows, and the Indian arrows flying thickly, wounding the horses, badly injuring Flowers, and killing two of the passengers. The others escaped after a hard run. In the Spring of 1865

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the Plains tribes again became very troublesome, and raided the stage line almost from end to end. Soldiers were used to guard the coaches, yet attacks were frequent, and the loss in property and lives was large. Passengers took their lives in their hands, and only the most daring and reckless men volunteered for the desperate service of driver or messenger.

### Military Guards for Coaches

This custom of guarding coaches by soldiers along the Overland was inaugurated during the Sioux uprising of 1863. George P. Belden, well known in those days as "The White Chief," thus describes the disagreeable duties:

"Troops were stationed in small squads at every station, about ten miles apart, and they rode from station to station on the top of all coaches, holding their guns ever ready for action. It was not pleasant, this sitting perched up on top of a coach, riding through dark ravines and tall grass, in which savages were ever lurking. Generally the first fire from the Indians killed one or two horses, and tumbled a soldier or two off the top of the coach. This setting oneself as a sort of target was a disagreeable and dangerous duty, but the soldiers performed it without murmuring. My squad had to ride up to Cottonwood, and down to the station below, where they waited for the next coach going the other way, and returned by it to their post at Gilman's. All the other stations were guarded in like manner, so it happened that every coach carried some soldiers."

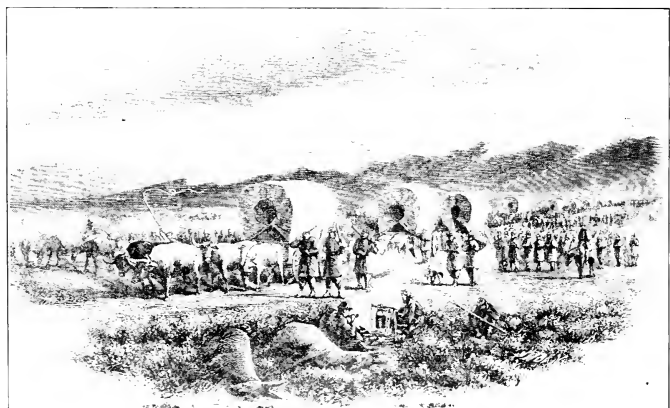
### Military Posts to Protect Settlements

A brief review of the operations of military scouting parties in the region about Julesburg, Colorado, which was the centre of hostilities on the

## THE GREAT PLAINS

Plains, and occasionally entirely cut off from communication, well illustrates the desperate nature of their duties. During 1863-4-5 the Sioux, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes were all upon the warpath, and not a mile of prairie between the upper Missouri and the Arkansas was safe for a white traveller. As early as 1860 trouble began, after the beginning of emigration to Colorado and the discovery of gold in the Rocky Mountains. Bent's Fort was occupied by troops, and, in anticipation of coming events, several new posts were established throughout the Indian country, and occupied by small garrisons. The breaking out of the Civil War required the withdrawal of many of the regulars from the Plains, and the Indians, quick to perceive their opportunity, began wholesale depredations. In 1862 the Sioux made savage onslaught far east into Minnesota, and the general uprising among the tribes which followed extended to the Rocky Mountains, and even to the banks of the Columbia. In numbers engaged it attained to the magnitude of war, but was carried on in guerilla fashion.

The greater portion of the Plains country was then without permanent inhabitants, scarcely anything breaking the desolation excepting the isolated stations along the Overland and Santa Fe Trails, with a few scattered settlements extending into the prairies of Kansas and Nebraska. Though they occasionally attacked small bodies of troops, the savages directed their main efforts against the trains of freight wagons, and the comparatively defence-



THE UNITED STATES ARMY IN SERVICE ON THE PLAINS  
IN CONFLICT WITH WINTER STORMS — THE LAST STAND — ON THE MARCH



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less stage stations. The most important of these, situated in the very heart of this blood-stained territory, was Julesburg. This point was then the junction between the Overland main line and the newly established branch leading to Denver. It was also the headquarters of the telegraph on the Plains, which had been inaugurated in 1861. Julesburg must have contained at this period something over a hundred civilian inhabitants, most of them employees of the stage company. As protection for both lines the Government later erected Fort Sedgwick on the South Fork of the Platte. Julesburg was attacked on several occasions, and in February, 1864, was burned to the ground. About fifty-five miles of the telegraph line was entirely destroyed, and stage stations razed, and employees killed, for long distances east and west. About the same time, a force of over two thousand Indians made a determined attack upon a detachment of troops, under Lieutenant-colonel Collins at Rush Creek, eighty-five miles north of Julesburg. There followed a twenty-four-hour fight, from which the whites emerged with a loss of but three men killed, and eight wounded. Two months later Collins was again in battle at Mud Springs, but succeeded in driving off his assailants.

As soon as the Spring of 1865 began to freshen the grass, the Indian tribes were again upon the warpath. In four weeks they had killed and captured forty-five whites between Sage Creek and Virginia Dale, but a combination of military forces



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compelled the allied tribes to make professions of peace, and for a few months relieved the Trail of its horror. The full story of these years of soldierly endeavor and Indian treachery must be told in those chapters devoted to the work of the army, but it is easy to conceive the danger which night and day pursued those men who were then employed upon the Overland. Never for a moment could they feel secure; every trip promised to be their last, and many a time the coach dashed up to a station only to find it in ruins and surrounded by dead. The tales of suffering, of desperate fighting, of marvelous endurance, cling yet to every mile from the Little Blue to Laramie. The dead of those awful years lie numberless and nameless in their unknown, scattered graves.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PONY EXPRESS

#### Need of Better Mail Service for California

**I**F ANY one single achievement of the Plains should be chosen with which to stir the heart to admiration of adventure and picturesque environment, it would certainly be the work done by those riders, who, through night and day, amid solitude and constant peril, swept at full speed, with their precious messages, from the Missouri to the Coast. It was a service absolutely unique in the history of men, and holds the world's record for organized and "scheduled" riding. Never before or since has mail been carried so fast and so far by horse power, never through such continuous danger, through such leagues of utter desolation, and never were mounts so steadily spurred to highest speed in any regular service.

The gold discovery of 1848 in California led to a wonderful exodus to the Pacific Coast. In vast streams the huge trains of American gold-seekers swept across the Plains and the mountains, by the Overland, the Oregon, and the Santa Fe Trails. As many more found passage to the far West by way of Panama and Nicaragua, or by means of the long voyage around stormy Cape Horn. Within ten years the population of California had so greatly increased that the desire for more rapid communi-

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cation with the East became imperative. The insistent demand of these isolated California miners was taken to Washington by their representative, Senator Gwinn, and in the Winter of 1859 he succeeded in inducing the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell to undertake the gigantic enterprise of the Pony Express. This firm already had a daily stage-coach in operation between the Missouri River and Salt Lake, with stations located every ten or twelve miles along the route. These could be easily utilized for this new service, but beyond Salt Lake other similar stations had to be established, and the best possible route selected for rapid travel. However, in less than two months after Russell gave his promise to Gwinn, everything was in readiness, and the gallant riders were off on their long race half across a continent.

### **The Men and the Ponies Required for the Work**

We may scarcely comprehend the magnitude of the preparations necessary for such an enterprise. To carry this fast mail over the route selected between St. Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, a distance of nineteen hundred and fifty miles, over barren plains and through dangerous mountains, there were required five hundred horses, one hundred and ninety stations, two hundred men to take charge of them, and eighty carefully selected riders, who must each day make an average ride at full speed of thirty-three and one-third miles. The stations were sometimes from sixty-five to even a hun-

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dred miles apart, according to the location of water. The fastest time ever made on the Butterfield Route between New York and San Francisco was twenty-one days; the Pony Express cut it to less than eight. Its scheduled time from the Missouri River was ten days; its reckless riders never required more, while on one occasion they lowered this remarkable record to seven days and seventeen hours, and more than once to a little over eight days.

The men employed were chosen with great care; they were men noted for bravery, coolness, and lithe, wiry physiques. In Inman's appreciative words:

"It was no easy duty; horse and human flesh were strained to the limits of physical tension. Day or night, in sunshine or in storm, under the darkest skies, in the pale moonlight, and with only the stars at times to guide him, the brave rider must speed on. Rain, hail, snow, or sleet, there was no delay; his precious burden of letters demanded his best efforts under the stern necessities of the hazardous service; it brooked no detention; on he must ride. Sometimes his pathway led across level prairies, straight as the flight of an arrow. It was oftener a zig-zag trail hugging the brink of awful precipices, and dark, narrow cañons infested with watchful savages eager for the scalp of the daring man who had the temerity to enter their mountain fastness."

These riders had to be always ready at their stations—not only for their regular trip, but for any emergency which might arise, as they were frequently called upon for double duty; at any moment they must be prepared to spring into saddle and be off like a shot. The ponies employed were

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magnificent specimens, selected for speed and endurance. Most carefully fed and housed, on the road they were pushed to their utmost; spurred ten miles at the very limit of pace, the animal came dashing in to the next station flecked with foam, nostrils dilated, and every hair wet with perspiration. Nearly two thousand miles must be covered in nine days or less—neither pony nor man could idle. The rider was allowed but two minutes at a station in which to exchange mounts, yet it scarcely required more than two seconds. Almost before he touched the ground the man was off again, a dim speck down the trail. Two hundred and fifty miles a day was the distance travelled, and the rider could carry no surplus weight. His sole arms were a revolver and a knife; his case of precious letters made into a bundle no larger than an ordinary writing tablet. The mail-bags were two pouches of leather, impervious to rain, sealed, and strapped securely to the saddle both before and behind. They never contained over twenty pounds in weight, and inside, for better protection from possible exposure, the letters and despatches were wrapped in oil silk, and separately sealed. The pouches were not opened between River and Coast.

These riders were paid from one hundred dollars to one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, and "found." The postage charged during the earlier months of the service was five dollars per half-ounce, but was later reduced to one dollar, at which sum it remained until the completion of

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the Overland telegraph in October, 1861. Letters thus carried were written on the thinnest tissue paper; papers destined for the Coast were printed on the same thin paper, and had to be sent in letter envelopes at letter postage. A messenger has recorded that he remembered handling one letter which had on it twenty-five Pony Express stamps of one dollar each, and twenty-five United States ten-cent stamps. It is safe to say no mail was thus sent unless considered of the greatest value. And the Pony Express had a proud record for safety, as well as efficiency. In all its career it lost but one mail. Another came very near doubling the list, as the rider was waylaid by Indians and scalped. But the pony broke away, and came clattering into the next station, severely wounded, with the saddlebags intact, leaving his rider dead in the desert. All the riding was not the same, as the distance to be covered, and the length between stations, was largely determined by the character of the country. Along some parts of the route the trail had to be covered at the astounding pace of twenty-five miles an hour.

### The First Run of the Pony Express

The first day of the start was the third of April, 1860, the time noon. At exactly the same hour the riders, the one facing east, the other west, left Sacramento and St. Joseph. The first starter from California was Harry Roff, on a half-breed bronco. He covered the first twenty miles, with one change, in fifty-nine minutes. He rode on at top speed

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fifty-five miles farther to Placerville at the foot of the Sierra Nevadas. Here a rider known as Boston grasped the mail-bag, crossed the eastern summit of the Sierras, and ended his run at Friday's Station. Sam Hamilton came next, spurring his pony through Genoa, Carson City, Dayton, and Reed's Station to Fort Churchill, a seventy-five mile run. The mail by now was one hundred and eighty-five miles out, including the crossing of the Sierra Nevadas through thirty feet of snow; the time consumed fifteen hours and twenty minutes. From Churchill Bob Haslam ("Pony Bob") followed the trail one hundred and twenty miles, through a hostile Indian country, to Smith's Creek, where Jay G. Kelly swung the precious bag to his saddle, and spurred away to Ruby Valley, Utah, a heart-breaking ride of one hundred and sixteen miles of desert. Richardson came next, one hundred and five miles to Deep Creek. The last part of the western division, the fifty miles between Camp Floyd and Salt Lake City, was covered by George Thacher. From St. Joseph Johnny Frey started the run westward, his pony bursting away from the midst of a crowd of enthusiastic spectators. That first run was made in less than ten days.

### Experiences of Buffalo Bill as an Express Rider

The adventures of these Pony Express riders, the stories of their hardihood and marvellous horsemanship, are numberless. Perhaps the best-known name among them is that of William F. Cody



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A MULE TRAIN AT THE FORD



*Copyright. By courtesy S. S. McClure Co.*

THE SOUTHERN OVERLAND MAIL STAGE

SCENES INCIDENT TO TRAVEL ACROSS THE PLAINS





## THE PONY EXPRESS

("Buffalo Bill"), who first began riding in the service when only a boy of fourteen, yet "made good" in a work, the ceaseless hardship of which was calculated to try the nerve and endurance of the most daring men. Afraid that Cody would break down under the strain, "Old Jules," then owner of the Julesburg Ranch, and Division Agent for the Pony Express line, started the boy with an easy run of forty-five miles, with three changes of horses. He rode there two months, and then applied for another position under Slade, afterwards a notorious desperado, who had the division west of Laramie. He got it, being assigned to ride from Red Buttes on the North Platte to the Three Crossings of the Sweetwater, a distance of one hundred and sixteen miles. Again the boy "made good"; more than that—on one occasion he broke the record for the longest Pony Express ride. One day galloping into Three Crossings he found the rider who was to go on had been killed the night before in a drunken row. The distance to the next station, Rocky Ridge, was eighty-five miles over a bad and dangerous trail. Without a moment's delay Cody went forward, and he made the 384 miles of his round trip, without stops, except to change horses and swallow one hasty meal—and the mail went through on time.

A week later this same youthful messenger was chased by Sioux Indians near Horse Creek, but succeeded in outracing them to the station at Sweetwater. Here he found the stock all driven off and

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the station-keeper killed, and was compelled to continue his ride with the same tired pony. The Indian raids became so continuous that the operation of the Pony Express was discontinued for six weeks. In Inman's "Salt Lake Trail" are a number of anecdotes of Cody's experiences at this time, well illustrating the danger of the Pony Express riders, and the constant necessity for coolness and nerve. And just such men rode the trail, day and night, from River to Coast.

### Other Express Riders

"Pony Bob" (Robert H. Haslam) had a most remarkable record, and probably rode Express longer than any other messenger. He was in the first relay, and remained in the service to the end. His regular run was from Buckland's to Friday's Station, crossing the Sierra Nevada, one of the hardest rides on the entire route. On one occasion he covered 380 miles without pause, through a region swarming with Indians on the warpath, who had already killed the next rider. On this trip he passed the smoking ruins of three stations, and the dead bodies of their keepers, yet he brought the mail barely three hours behind schedule time. After the telegraph had ended Pony Express riding, Haslam became a Wells, Fargo messenger, making a hundred-mile round trip every twenty-four hours. For six months he ran between Reno and Virginia City every day, doing twenty-three miles in one hour, and using fifteen horses. On one of his rides

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he passed the remains of ninety Chinamen killed by Indians. Their bodies were scattered over ten miles. When he finally left the service the man who took his place, Macaulus, was killed by Indians on his first trip.

Charles Cliff was a rider well known on the Plains division, having a run from St. Joseph to Seneca. He was once attacked by Indians, but escaped, receiving three balls in his body, and twenty-seven in his clothing. James Moore has credit for a remarkable ride. At Midway Station, western Nebraska, he received an important Government despatch to carry west. He spurred his ponies at top speed to Julesburg, one hundred and forty miles away. Here he found another important despatch for Washington, and that the rider who should carry it had been killed by Indians. Without eating, and with a loss of only seven minutes, Moore immediately started back for Midway, and he made the round trip (280 miles) in fourteen hours and forty-six minutes.

### High Average Speed of the Pony Express

As already stated, the schedule time between the Missouri and Sacramento was established at ten days. Never once did the Pony Express fail to make it, and on many occasions the daring riders came in far ahead. Buchanan's last message was whisked across the two thousand miles in eight days and a few hours; the news of Lincoln's election covered the 665 miles to Denver in two days and

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twenty-one hours. But the record for such long-distance riding was completely shattered when Lincoln's inaugural was borne from rider to rider to the Coast in the marvellous space of but seven days and seventeen hours. It was a Pony Express rider who made the most wonderful straight-away ride ever made by man, but it was not performed in the course of duty. The rider was a Canadian, Francis Xavier Aubrey, and he rode on a bet that he could cover the distance between Santa Fe and Independence (800 miles) in eight days. One thousand dollars was involved. In the whole distance he did not stop to rest, changing horses only every hundred miles, and he made it in five days and thirteen hours. Aubrey has been described as of stocky build, light-hearted, genial, adventurous, and absolutely fearless. He was later killed in Santa Fe.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—THE FIRST ENCOUNTERS

#### Guerilla Warfare on the Plains

**A** RMY operations on the Great Plains, both before and during the Civil War, whether conducted by regulars or volunteers, were of a nature requiring but brief mention. While the various Indian tribes became more and more hostile in their relations with the whites, and were guilty of many atrocities, there was no concerted action in retaliation on the part of those in authority at Washington. Numerous petty fights have been recorded, but there was no well organized campaign, no battle of supreme importance, and no particular result achieved. For years guerilla warfare swept the border from end to end, doing an immense amount of damage to property, and costing an unknown number of lives. Treaties were repeatedly made and broken, settlements were raided and burned, wagon trains were attacked, the teamsters left dead on the trail, the mules captured, and the route of the Overland made into a dreary waste. The reason for all these things it is hard to discover, and, at this late day, equally futile the endeavor to fix the blame. In some cases it was undoubtedly the fault of the savages; in many others the whites were the aggressors; while in not a few the awful pun-

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ishment inflicted, whether by Indian or white, fell upon the innocent. In the years between 1840 and 1860 no warlike alliance between the various Plains tribes appears to have existed. There was a vindictive feeling among all the Indians because of the steady white invasion of their country, but it had not yet crystallized into open rebellion under any competent leaders. The Comanches in the Southwest were always in a state of hostility, yet their war-parties were small, and they seldom appeared in any considerable force outside of New Mexico and western Texas, their usual method being that of surprise and swift attack. To the north the Sioux were never entirely safe, and their young men were restless and great wanderers. But in the middle Plains the major portion of the numerous outrages committed were doubtless done by semi-outlaw bands, under control of sub-chiefs eager for reputation, or half-breeds, like Brent, with no other purpose than plunder and a lust for crime.

### Disagreeable Nature of the Soldiers' Work

This very fact rendered the services of the army on that wide frontier more disagreeable, hazardous, and difficult. If successful, they were devoid of honor; if otherwise, all the soldier might hope for was a forgotten grave. Isolated in rude forts, during the summer in temporary camps, a company of infantry here, a troop of horse yonder, with the nearest station hundreds of miles distant, and all around them dissatisfied and threatening savages

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outnumbering them fifty to one, it was a service far from attractive to either officers or men. In detached parties they scouted the Plains from end to end; they lived on half-rations, or no rations at all; they marched and counter-marched; they burned and thirsted under the tropical summer sun of the Staked Plains, and faced the stinging blasts of Dakota blizzards; they held peace councils with the tribes, halting many a projected raid by the suddenness of their appearance where least expected; and, when all other means were exhausted, they fought battles never dignified by names, or noticed in history, and fought them gallantly and well.

### Numerous Indian Raids

Little of this is to be found on record; it was the mere routine of service, totally obscured by the far greater events of the Civil War. Only here and there do certain happenings upon the broad Plains, and the bordering mountains, throw light upon this heroic work of the army. Almost immediately after the close of the Mexican War two or three tribes of the Plains entered into loose alliance to prey on the growing traffic of the Santa Fe Trail. So thoroughly was this agreement carried out that the United States troops in New Mexico were for a time completely cut off from all supplies from the East. There was considerable fighting in eastern and northern New Mexico, before communication could be resumed. In 1854 all the inhabitants of the Pueblo, on the Arkansas, some twenty in num-



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ber, were massacred by Ute Indians in a drunken revel. The following year troops from Fort Massachusetts had a hard campaign in southern Colorado, punishing the Utes for numerous raids in New Mexico. The same year fifteen hundred lodges of Kiowas, Comanches, Osages, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes marched eastward across the Plains, determined to wipe out those more peaceful Indian tribes bordering the Missouri. They met their match, however, and were driven back after a three hours' battle on the banks of the Kansas River. In the Comanche country it was always war, and this tribe quarrelled openly with all others who entered into peace treaties with the whites.

### A War with the Sioux

Farther north, for the purpose of protecting emigration along the Oregon Trail, a small military force, composed of a single company reduced to twenty-five effective men, was stationed at Fort Laramie. About them were Sioux, Arapahoes, and Cheyennes, all far from friendly, numbering 5,500 souls, of whom at least half were warriors. Thoroughly despising so small an armed force of whites, these Indians, visiting the fort, became insolent, and had to be forcibly expelled beyond the limits of the post. This resulted in an encounter, in which shots were exchanged and four of the savages killed. The following spring Lieutenant Grattan, a young officer lately from West Point, accompanied by twenty-eight men, was sent to the camp of a band of



SCENES CHARACTERISTIC OF INDIAN ATTACK AND THE DE-  
FENCE OF THE SETTLERS

THE LAST STAND — EMIGRANTS REPELLING AN ATTACK — DEFENDING THE  
WAGON TRAIN

THE  
NEW YORK  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY  
ASTOR  
LENOX  
TILDEN  
1909

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Sioux with orders to make an arrest. Meeting with some resistance, the squad fired a volley, and immediately the Indians were upon them. Only one soldier escaped, in dying condition, and regained the fort.

This was the beginning of a long and costly war with the Sioux nation. Measures were at once taken by the War Department to punish fitly the murderers of Grattan and his men, but owing to the lateness of the season little was accomplished that year except the strengthening of the garrison at Laramie by three companies of the Sixth Infantry, under Major Hoffman, who assumed command. In the Spring of 1856 other troops arrived, but, there being no cavalry, little could be accomplished, other than defensive guard. The Sioux captured all the mules belonging to the Quartermaster's Department, and escaped with them, meanwhile carrying out their threats, and constantly raiding the stage line, killing drivers and burning stations. General Harney, with a force of 1,500 soldiers marched up the valley of the Platte. His scouting parties had several small skirmishes on the way, but no blow of any severity was struck until September, when the entire force came upon a village of Brule Sioux, under Little Thunder, at Ash Hollow, a hundred miles southeast of Laramie. Here there was a few moments of rather hot fighting, in which many women and children, and a few warriors were killed. The action resulted in a temporary truce.

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This same year Fort Randall was established in the Yankton country.

### Sumner's Expedition against the Cheyennes

While this rather bloodless campaign was being conducted in the north, the Cheyennes were making things interesting along the middle Plains, and keeping busy the small garrisons of the only two posts between the Missouri and the Rockies. The trouble apparently first arose over the shooting of certain Indian horse-thieves by an army patrol stationed at the Upper Platte Bridge. The result was an onslaught upon all the travelled routes across the Plains, and the reduction of Fort Laramie to a condition only less rigorous than an actual siege. In the Summer of 1857 an expedition, formed of troops from Leavenworth and Laramie, under Colonel Sumner, First Dragoons, was organized to operate against these raiding Cheyennes. Camp was made near Fort Saint Vrain, on the South Platte, In July, everything being in readiness, the little column marched to the Smoky Hill branch of the Kansas River. Here the Cheyennes were met, gathered beside a small lake, which they believed enchanted, so that if they dipped their hands in the water they became invulnerable. Under this impression they attacked the troops with firmness, chanting their war-songs as they advanced. But the dragoons charged with sabres, killing and wounding a large number, and putting the remainder to flight. From this point Sumner made a hasty march to

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the relief of Bent's Fort, on the Arkansas; he arrived just in time to prevent the scheming Arapahoes from killing all the whites there and taking possession of the property. Sumner's expedition completely intimidated the Cheyennes, and for the time being checked the outrages along the border.

### Further Efforts to Pacify the Indians

In September, Major Lynde with two companies of the Seventh Infantry arrived at Fort Laramie, and wintered there, Major Hoffman, with his command of the Sixth, departing on the long march for Leavenworth. The next summer, 1858, Major Sedgwick, with four more companies of the Seventh, and headquarters, staff, and band, came across the Plains bound for Utah. Learning at Pacific Springs that the Mormon difficulty had been settled, the column was turned back eastward, and a military post established at the junction of the two forks of the Kansas River. First called Camp Centre, it became later the famous Fort Riley.

In 1859 W. W. Bent, an old-time plainsman, favorably known to all the tribes, was appointed Indian Agent for the Upper Arkansas. It was largely his influence that kept the surrounding regions comparatively peaceable for the next two years. The Kiowas and Comanches had by this time been driven from Texas, and now permanently occupied the country lying between the Arkansas and the Canadian. They numbered about 2,500 warriors, and assumed so threatening an attitude

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that posts were established at the mouth of Pawnee Fork, and near the site of Bent's Fort, for their better control. The first was named Fort Larned, and the second Fort Wise; the latter afterward became Fort Lyon.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—DURING THE CIVIL WAR

#### An Alliance of Indian Tribes

THE necessities arising from the outbreaking of war between the North and the South caused the almost total withdrawal of regular troops from the Plains, leaving at some posts barely a corporal's guard as protection to Government property. The Indian tribes, uneasy before, were quick to discover their opportunity for outbreak, and a vast offensive alliance, involving nearly all the fighting tribes of the Great Plains, was rapidly effected. Scarcely had the great struggle for the preservation of the nation begun before the savages burst forth in terrible ferocity along the Western trails, confident they could now murder and rob without danger of immediate punishment. Unable to spare regular troops with which to combat this sudden Indian uprising, the Government despatched to the Plains certain hastily organized regiments of volunteers which had been destined for the main army, while the authorities of Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado mustered local organizations for the defence of their own borders. By this time the two former communities had attained to a considerable population, but grouped in the more eastern counties and along the principal water-courses; the Plains



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proper, being considered totally unfit for agriculture, remained in original desolation. In Colorado a comparatively large population had suddenly sprung up as a result of valuable gold discoveries made in 1858. It was of the restless, adventurous frontier type, admirably adapted to the exigencies of Indian campaigning. The volunteer organizations thus utilized for the protection of the border found ample work confronting them, and saw much of hardship and fighting.

### Some Small Successes of the Soldiers

In 1862 the Second Colorado, under Colonel Leavenworth, was the only force operating along the Arkansas. It had headquarters at Fort Lyon, formerly Fort Wise, and was kept exceedingly busy by the constant depredations of raiding parties of Comanches and Kiowas. In January, 1863, the First Colorado Cavalry, Colonel Chivington, arrived at this post, and the Second Colorado marched east to Forts Larned and Leavenworth for the better protection of the Santa Fe Trail. In July this force met an invasion of Texans at Cabin Creek, and, after a sharp fight, in which the enemy lost forty killed and wounded, drove the invaders back across the Kansas border. The First Cavalry now became the only armed force in the country north of Fort Garland, and found plenty to do. Actual field work, however, did not begin until 1864, when the Indians made a raid on a herd of commissary

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cattle, running off one hundred and seventy-five head from a point forty miles southeast of Denver.

Lieutenant Ayre with a detachment followed, and recovered twenty; one of his men was wounded. Returning to the post for subsistence, the Lieutenant, with one hundred troopers and two Howitzers, started again on the trail, and proceeded east almost to Fort Larned. Near the head of the Republican and Smoky Hill Forks he ran into a band of four hundred Cheyennes, and a desperate fight ensued. The Indians charged the howitzers, rushing to the belching muzzles, and falling dead within reach of the gunners. About thirty were killed, including the chief, the whites retiring victorious. The same month, at Kiowa Creek, a similar incident occurred, the Indian horse-thieves being this time pursued vigorously by Lieutenant Clark Dunn, with twenty troopers. His force attacked fifty Cheyennes, but being armed only with revolvers and sabres, it inflicted but little damage. Near the junction of the South Platte, Major Downing, pursuing a third raiding party, surprised a fortified Indian camp, killed twenty-five, destroyed the village, and captured a hundred horses. Only one soldier was killed in this affair.

But in spite of these small successes, repeated and horrible outrages increased. In June came the murder of the Hungate family, and the stampede of stock from the settlements along Box Elder Creek, within a few miles of Denver. The Indians escaped.

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In July a general Indian council was held at Pawnee Fork, participated in by Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Comanches, Apaches, and Kiowas. Promises made at this time to the Indian agent were almost immediately broken. Even while returning from the peace council a band of Kiowas stampeded all the stock at Fort Larned, and a few days later the Arapahoes made a raid on the settlers along the river. The situation was becoming most critical; not more than six weeks' supply of food was left in the Territory; mail communication with the East was entirely suspended, messengers having been killed, and the letters scattered to the winds. Only one station was left standing for a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, and for four hundred miles the freighting wagons durst not brave the trail.

### Outrages by Indians and by Colonel Chivington

In spite of the danger hovering over every mile of the way, this year witnessed an immense emigration to the Pacific. Nineteen thousand *en route* are reported to have passed Fort Laramie. That a great many were killed on the way is beyond question, although no records were preserved. Many trains reported having been attacked, and some of the emigrants were obliged to desert their goods and cattle. Of settlers residing within the limits of Colorado more than two hundred were made victims. So bold became the Indian raiders that they organized for simultaneous attack on exposed settlements

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miles apart. For thirty days no mails reached Denver, and no stages, or freighting trains moved in Colorado. Then newly organized militia, under General Teller, took the field and patrolled the road between Denver and Julesburg, leaving the First Cavalry to operate along the Arkansas. Beyond thus opening up communication with the East comparatively little was accomplished by either force, time being frittered away in councils with various small bands, some of whom surrendered. One of these, composed of 400 Arapahoes and Cheyennes, was sent to Sand Creek by the Indian agent, practically as prisoners. Here, without any known provocation, on November 27, Colonel Chivington, with nine hundred men of the First Cavalry, made a ferocious attack, killing 131 men, women, and children, with a loss to the soldiers of fifty killed and wounded. No justification of this act of treachery has ever been advanced. The number of troops now in the field held eastern Colorado peaceful until the close of the Civil War.

### Engagements with Sioux, Cheyennes, and Arapahoes

Farther to the north the Sioux broke into rebellion as soon as the regular troops were withdrawn from their territory, and were assisted in their raids by Cheyennes and Pawnees. Fort Laramie and the Black Hills became the more prominent storm centres. The first volunteer forces at Laramie were two troops Fourth Iowa Cavalry, one Sixth Ohio Cavalry, and one company Eighth

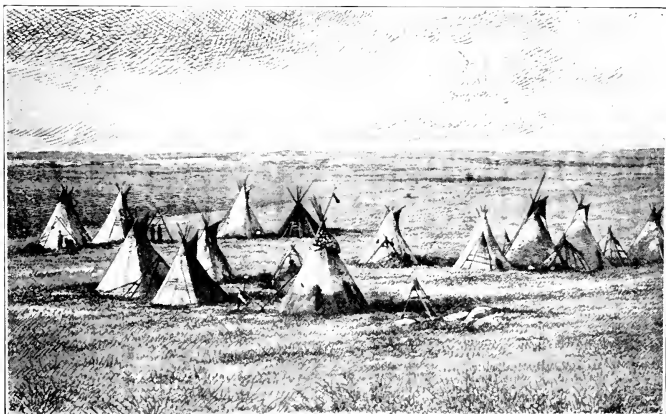
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Kansas Infantry. There were constant changes, however, the First and Eleventh Ohio Cavalry, the Seventh Iowa and the Sixth Michigan all seeing service at this exposed post. The first outbreak of the Sioux swept the border settlements of Minnesota in 1862, and was immediately followed by a general uprising throughout the country of the northern and central Plains. With the exception of those few inhabitants gathered about the Overland stage stations, there were not many permanent settlements at this date beyond the eastern Platte or along the valley of the Missouri. But the stage lines and freighting caravans suffered greatly, and murder and robbery marked every mile of the Trail. The year 1864 was the bloodiest of the period. General Sully, with 3,000 men, led an expedition directly into the Sioux country, and, at Deer Stand, closed in battle with 15,000 warriors. The Indians were defeated, losing 585 braves. Farther west, in the Bad Lands, Sully fought them again, and defeated them, but was unable to discover and destroy their villages.

While this force was still operating in Dakota, the Arapahoes were engaged in deadly work to the south and west of Laramie, attacking emigrant trains, and on several occasions burning alive prisoners bound to their wagon wheels. Finally the Sioux, breaking away before Sully's determined advance, swept down through the Black Hills to the Powder River, and united with their allies, the Cheyennes. Several fierce but small engage-



INDIANS EXECUTING A WAR DANCE  
(Stockaded Fort in the Background)



AN INDIAN ENCAMPMENT

## INDIAN LIFE ON THE GREAT PLAINS



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ments occurred between their raiding parties and detachments of troops from the Seventh Iowa Cavalry, in the neighborhood of Julesburg. Men of the Eleventh Ohio were also engaged, and gave a good account of themselves, but these minor fights did not serve to check the continued depredations of the savages.

### Indians Sue for Peace

Several expeditions were organized, the most important being that under command of General Connor, for the purpose of clearing the road to Montana, via the Powder and Big Horn Rivers. He had with him a considerable force, consisting of detachments from the Sixth and Seventh Michigan Cavalry, two hundred Pawnee and Omaha scouts, and a battery of the Second Missouri Artillery. The column advanced to the head of the Tongue River without encountering any hostiles, and the expedition finally degenerated into a mere hunt after wild game, in which the officers found much pleasure. Yet this, with other movements and the concentration of troops, now made possible by the ending of the Civil War, told the chiefs of the Sioux nation, the impossibility of longer safely continuing upon the warpath. In October Swift Bear's band came in to Laramie suing for peace, and reported that others were ready to follow him. Peace Commissioners were appointed, and met in council with the representatives of the various Sioux tribes. Satisfactory terms were agreed upon, and the Cheyennes



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and Arapahoes joined with the majority of the Sioux in a treaty of peace. Red Cloud, chief of the Ogallala Sioux, refused to present himself at this conference, and continued to express his dissatisfaction and hostility. In the next few months his following greatly increased, and he became sufficiently powerful to inaugurate another serious outbreak.

### Praise for the Fighters of the Indians

The close of the war between the States caused the mustering out of the volunteer troops, and the despatching once more of regulars to the frontier for the purpose of garrisoning the scattered posts. No words can fitly honor the services rendered to the West by the volunteer organizations then disbanded. Inspired by patriotism, the men had offered themselves to the Government to help to save the nation from dismemberment. They burned with eagerness to be despatched to the front to battle against those forces arrayed in arms against their country. Instead, they were sent to the Indian-raided frontier, and assigned to work of the most disagreeable character. They were called upon to suffer hardships, wounds, and death in profitless Indian campaigning; to garrison isolated posts, and to guard long lines of stage routes through barren Plains. Without hope of honor, and without the inspiration which arises from opportunities for great achievements, their colors undecorated with the names of noble battlefields, their service ob-

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scure and known only to a few, these commands performed the duty given them with patience and fidelity. They marched and fought, they suffered and died, they braved the fiery sun of midsummer on arid Plains, the bitter storms of winter amid the mountains. To their great sacrifice the West owes much gratitude, and the nation may well be proud of such worthy sons.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—MASSACRE AT FORT PHILIP KEARNEY

#### The Sioux Dissatisfied with the Treaty of Peace

**T**HE mass of the Sioux warriors were never satisfied with that treaty which a few minor chiefs had signed at Fort Laramie. Under the leadership of Red Cloud, one of the greatest Indians the Plains have produced, this opposition grew warlike and threatening. A mistake of the Government at about this time tended to give these malcontents courage and to swell their ranks. This was the abandoning and dismantling of the military posts of Fort Reno, Fort Philip Kearney, and Fort C. F. Smith on the east side of the Big Horn Mountains. The Sioux were quick to construe this retreat as exhibiting fear of their prowess, and the result was a long, distressing struggle which did not reach its conclusion until 1870.

#### Colonel Carrington Builds Fort Philip Kearney

The story of Fort Philip Kearney during the two years it remained garrisoned is one of the most tragic in American history. Colonel Henry B. Carrington was the officer selected to build this fort in the far wilderness. With a little army of seven hundred men, five hundred of whom were raw recruits, four pieces of artillery, and two hundred and

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twenty-six wagons, he left Fort Kearney, Nebraska, May 19, 1866. Trouble with the Indians was not anticipated, as the peace treaty had already been duly signed. Wives and children of several of the officers accompanied the column, riding in ambulances, so satisfied were those in authority that they were going upon a peaceful mission. The march was slow, the distance great—more than six hundred miles to Fort Reno, at the crossing of the Powder River. Nearly all this distance the column passed through the Sioux country, yet saw no hostile Indian, although it is probable their every step was spied upon. On the twenty-eighth of June they arrived at Fort Reno.

By this time the Indians, no longer having any doubt as to their purpose, began annoying the troops, obstructing their progress, and endeavoring to stampede their stock. Thus discovering the Sioux in warlike mood, Carrington, unwilling to abandon Fort Reno, restockaded the fort, and garrisoned it from his command. Then, accompanied by a force now numbering barely five hundred, he pushed forward into the farther wilderness. He selected as a site for the new fort a spot on the banks of Big Piney Creek, an affluent of Powder River, about four miles from the Big Horn Range, with Cloud Peak towering above it nine thousand feet into the air. This was on July 13, 1866. The men fell promptly to work, cutting trees, preparing the ground, and placing timbers in position, all anxious to have the labor completed before the winter shut

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down upon them. This labor was carried forward under the utmost difficulty, and in an atmosphere of constant danger. Apparently they were from the very first surrounded by hostile savages; the wood-choppers, the wood trains, the cattle, had to be protected constantly by armed guards. Scarcely a day passed without a death by violence. During the first six months of occupancy the Indians killed one hundred and fifty-four persons—soldiers and civilians,—wounded twenty more, and captured nearly seven hundred animals. Early in October two contract surgeons, together with Lieutenant Grummond and his young bride and an escort of eight men arrived. As they reached the main gate they had to wait the passage of a wagon bearing the scalped and mutilated body of a soldier just killed. It was a strange welcome to the young wife, almost prophetic of another tragedy only two months away.

### Siege of the Fort

By the thirty-first of October the troops were fairly under cover, although the post was never fully completed. The last log, however, was placed in the stockade, and the garrison flag floated at the apex of the staff. From that moment the troops within the shelter of those log walls were in a state of siege. The Indians fairly swarmed about, making several actual attacks in force, while every supply train from the east had to fight its way through. Twice the savages captured the post herd, grazing under guard almost within rifle-shot of the stockade.

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The wood train was still sent out seven miles to Piney Island, but seldom returned without an attack. A lookout was kept stationed on Pilot Hill, where he could signal the garrison for help on such occasions. In this way a relief column was instantly despatched to assist the wagons to get in.

On the sixth of December such an attack was made on the wood train when only two miles from the fort, and Captain W. J. Fetterman was despatched with forty mounted men to its relief, while Colonel Carrington, with another small command, sought to outflank the savages. Fetterman drove the Indians from the train, and pursued them four miles, when, being reinforced, they suddenly turned and charged down upon him. Taken by surprise, a part of the command gave way, leaving Fetterman, Captain Brown, and Lieutenant Wands, with only fourteen men, to face the advancing warriors. This was done, however, until Carrington came up, but cost the lives of Lieutenant Bingham and Sergeant Bowers. By this time Red Cloud himself was in command of the allied Sioux, and the little garrison was permitted no rest.

### Captain Fetterman Goes to Rescue a Wood Train

Only two weeks later, December 21, a similar alarm was signalled in from Pilot Hill. A train numbering ninety men, all armed, had been sent out after more lumber. Suddenly the watchers of the fort read the signalled message, "Many Indians on wood road; train corralled and fighting." This was

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at eleven o'clock. Without delay eighty men were despatched to the rescue, and, at his own request, Captain Fetterman was put in command. Two other officers, Captain Brown and Lieutenant Grummond, accompanied the detachment as volunteers, and two frontiersmen, Fisher and Wheatley, who were armed with the recently invented Henry repeating rifle, requested permission to go along. About fifty of the soldiers carried Spencer repeating carbines, the remainder being armed with Springfield muzzle-loading rifles.

There has been much controversy over Carrington's orders to Fetterman on his leaving the fort, the contention being that the ardor of the latter officer caused him to advance much farther than his instructions warranted. Fetterman's scorn of the Indians was well known, he having boasted that with eighty men he could ride through the whole Sioux nation. He now had his eighty men, and the chance had come. On this occasion it would seem that his orders were explicit, "on no account to pursue the Indians beyond Lodge Tree Ridge." With these words of caution yet ringing in his ears Captain Fetterman led his little command forward upon the Montana Road, crossed Big Piney Creek, and passed to the southwest of Lodge Tree Ridge. His purpose was evidently to cut off the Indians who were still attacking the corralled wagon train. But as he approached the foot-hills other Indians suddenly appeared on his front and flank, and he promptly swung his men forward up the hill to the

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ridge. Just before twelve o'clock his skirmishers occupied the crest.

All this could be plainly seen from the fort. Shortly after, the Indians withdrew from their attack on the wood train, and at about the same time Fetterman's men, advancing as skirmishers, swept over the apex of the ridge and disappeared from view. Some scattered firing was heard, which shortly developed into a steady, continuous roar of rifles. Every listening man realized that desperate, savage fighting was going on out yonder in Peno Creek Valley. Colonel Carrington despatched Assistant Surgeon Hines with one man to the wood train, which was already starting to move in toward the fort. If his professional services were not needed there, Hines was instructed to endeavor to reach Fetterman. The two rode at full speed, passed the train, and headed their horses straight for Peno Creek. But Lodge Trail Ridge was black with Indians, and, finding it impossible to get through, the two dashed back to the fort with the report of what they had seen.

### Fetterman and his Band Slain

Carrington did not hesitate. Leaving barely soldiers enough to defend the post, he sent Captain Ten Eyck forward to the rescue with seventy-six men, mounted on every horse or mule to be found. Hines went with Ten Eyck, and the little command dashed straight for the ridge. Still afraid he had not sent out a sufficient force, Colonel



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Carrington hastily mustered forty more men, and sent them forward after Ten Eyck on the run. Only one hundred and nineteen were now left to man the walls of the fort and defend it in case of attack. As Ten Eyck pushed on, the sound of shots in the valley beyond the ridge died entirely away; and, when, at about one o'clock, his line of battle finally reached the summit, no sound reached them but the yelling of the savages. There was an inch or two of snow on the hills, and footprints were plainly visible showing where Fetterman's men had gone down into the valley. But nothing could be seen of them now. The entire valley seemed filled with warriors, crazed with victory, brandishing their weapons, and yelling defiance. Taunting and cursing, they dared the little band to come down. But Ten Eyck durst not move, and finally the Indian mass in his front began to move away, possibly fearing a flank attack from the train guard.

Cautiously, and realizing that two thousand Indians were still somewhere in his front, Ten Eyck swung his little command forward in line of battle down the slope. Half a mile in advance they mounted a small ridge which had obstructed their view, and near which the greater number of Indians had lately been massed. As they cleared its summit they came upon a sickening sight. Lying in a space less than fifty feet square, were the bodies of Captains Fetterman and Brown, with sixty-five enlisted men. They presented all the nameless horrors of Indian mutilation. But to these gallant com-

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rades of the relief force gazing down helplessly upon the awful scene of carnage, the horror was intensified by the evidence that this had been massacre, not battle. Nothing told of struggle, there were no signs of protracted defence; on the ground lay only five or six empty cartridge shells. What had really happened came home to those men of the relief column instantly,—Fetterman had started forth with insufficient ammunition, and with empty guns and empty cartridge belts, his men had been ridden down by the frenzied warriors, shot, speared and clubbed to death. Officers and men went down together struggling hopelessly to the last.

Although Lieutenant Grummond, several of the enlisted men, and the two civilians were not among those found lying in this ring of death, Captain Ten Eyck did not think it advisable to push his small force any farther forward. The short December day was already beginning to wane, and a courier was hastily despatched to the fort with the news, and a request for wagons in which to bring in the dead bodies. Two were sent, and forty-nine of the dead, all they would accommodate, placed upon them, and after dark the relief column, with their ghastly charge, reached the safety of the stockade. The next morning they found the others. A quarter of a mile in advance of where Fetterman had died were the bodies of Lieutenant Grummond and the missing soldiers. But they had evidently fallen after fighting desperately. All about them were dead ponies and patches of blood crimsoning the

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snow, while the ground was strewn with empty cartridge shells. Fisher and Wheatley were discovered together, a short distance away from the others, where they had taken shelter behind a pile of rocks. The frontiersmen had sold their lives dearly, for there were sixty gouts of blood, and ten dead Indian ponies within rifle shot of their position, while about them lay more than fifty emptied cartridge shells.

Little by little the facts of this terrible event came out by examination of the field and the bodies of the dead. Of all those men who fell in mass together only four, beside the two officers, had been struck by bullets. Helpless to defend themselves against the multitude of their enemies they had been killed by arrows, tomahawks, or spears, their last moments spent in torture. Brown and Fetterman were lying side by side, each with a bullet wound in the left temple. These had been fired so closely that the faces were burned and blackened with powder. Time and again both had sworn to die rather than be taken alive, and it is probable that in that moment of extremity they had kept their vows. It was made clear that the men had fought until their ammunition was exhausted, and then had either been ordered to retreat, or had started toward the fort without orders. All the dead cavalry horses lay with heads toward the fort. A retreat under such conditions meant annihilation. Grummond and his men probably fell in a heroic effort to cover

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

the retreat. This, at least, seems to be the story of the field.

### Colonel Carrington's March in a Blizzard

It was now midwinter, and the depleted garrison were shut up tightly within the stockade. Yet even under such conditions the War Department ordered Colonel Carrington to proceed to Fort Caspar. He was to be relieved of the command at Kearney by his Lieutenant-colonel, with four companies of the Eighteenth Infantry. The weather was severe, the snow banked almost to the top of the stockade, but, in the face of a blizzard, the march began. With Colonel Carrington were his wife and children, while Mrs. Grummond bore with her the remains of her husband. It was a journey of horror, during which the entire party narrowly escaped freezing to death. More than half the sixty-five composing the company were severely frost-bitten; three amputations and one death resulted from this unnecessary and cruel order. Thus ended this awful tragedy; less than a year later, almost on the same spot, came the opportunity for revenge.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—THIRTY-TWO AGAINST THREE THOUSAND

Captain Powell Escorts a Squad of Wood-Cutters

**T**HE killing of Fetterman's command gave great prestige to Red Cloud, and thousands of braves hastened to join him. More closely than ever did the rejoicing warriors invest Fort Kearney. Even through the bitter winter they continued to harass the garrison, and with the coming of spring every line of communication was sundered. When summer arrived, Red Cloud determined on open war and the razing of the fort to the ground. For this purpose he gathered together no less than three thousand warriors, the pick of all the Sioux fighting men. His plan was to make a direct attack August 1, 1867; in the meantime his skirmishing parties kept the soldiers so closely invested that they could learn little regarding his movements. Circumstances, however, compelled the wily old Chief to act earlier, and in the open. On the thirty-first of July a party of civilian wood-cutters were sent out from the fort to Piney Island, seven miles distant. They had with them fourteen wagons, and were guarded by Company C, Twenty-Seventh Infantry, numbering fifty-one men, the officers being

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Captain James Powell, and Lieutenant John C. Jenness. The trip out was made without incident, but upon arriving there the civilian contractor divided his squad of wood-cutters, so that Powell, in order to protect them while at work, was compelled to send a portion of his small guarding force with each party. A non-commissioned officer, with twelve men, was selected to care for those in the woods; thirteen men, under another non-commissioned officer, were detailed to escort the wagons. With the remaining twenty-six men and his lieutenant, Powell established headquarters near the centre of a level plain, perhaps a thousand yards across, and surrounded by low hills.

In hauling cord-wood only the running-gear of the wagons was used, and now, as the cutters fell promptly to work, the wagon boxes were removed. Powell at once had them arranged in the form of a wide oval in the very centre of this open Plain. They were deep, sufficiently so to conceal anyone lying in them. Loop-holes for rifle firing were made, and at the two ends of the oval two complete wagons were posted, so arranged as to break the force of a charge of horsemen. The space between these wagon boxes was packed with logs and sacks of grain, thus making a strong defence. Company C had just had issued to them the new Allen model of the Springfield breech-loading rifle, and their stock of ammunition was ample for all purposes.

Red Cloud, his plans nearly completed for an attack on the fort, determined that he would now

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begin by wiping out this detachment guarding the wood-cutters. He had no reason to suppose this would be a difficult operation. Powell's men were on the ground two days, however, before the Indians were prepared to commence their attack upon him. On the second of August, about nine in the morning, full two hundred braves dashed suddenly down upon the mule herd. The herders fought with determination, but finally lost their animals. At the same time five hundred other Indians made a fierce attack upon the wood train. The wood-cutters and their guard were driven back, abandoning their loads, four of the choppers being killed. Powell made a sortie from his improvised fort and drew the Indian fire, thus giving the men of the wood train, as well as the herders, an opportunity for escape; but he was driven back to the shelter of the corral. Finding the others were beyond reach, the savages now turned all their attention upon Powell.

### Rout of Red Cloud's Warriors

Before the scattered bands could be concentrated, Powell was ready. For the defence of the corral he had with him his lieutenant, twenty-six enlisted men, and four civilians, thirty-two in all. The few moments permitted for preparation were utilized to their fullest extent. The day previous they had received a wagonload of clothing and blankets. Not yet unbaled, this clothing was used to strengthen weak places in the corral, while the



RED CLOUD  
CHIEF OF THE OGALLA SIOUX





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blankets were spread over the wagon boxes the better to conceal the riflemen. Boxes of extra ammunition were opened and placed in easy reach; revolvers, axes, hatchets were scattered wherever they might prove most convenient, and pails filled with water for instant use in case of fire. Then, expecting to die, but determined to fight to the very last shot, the men took their places in the wagon boxes, their anxious eyes peering forth through the loopholes.

They had not long to wait. Suddenly the hillsides and valleys rang with the exultant war-whoops of more than two thousand warriors, and five hundred mounted Cheyennes and Arapahoes, their rifles in hand, swept out of the concealing woods, less than half a mile distant, and charged straight at that silent corral. No chief or brave dreamed such onslaught could fail. In utter contempt of the few whites lying behind those weak defences in the open Plain, they dashed recklessly forward, yelling their war cries. Half the distance was covered, and the corral remained grimly silent, exhibiting no sign of life. Fifty yards farther the quirt-lashed ponies leaped, and then, thirty rifles were flaming in their faces. Forsyth writes:

“On dash the warriors, though death shrieks now mingle with their war cries, and warriors and horses go down together; still the onrushing mass never hesitates or halts in its mad whirl, and recklessly sweeps over the fallen warriors as it dashes onward in a vain endeavor to hurl its weight on the little fire-vomiting corral, but so rapid and destructive is its fire that, before they are within ten yards of it, the horses recoil.

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In vain do the warriors sweep out and surround it. From every segment of the circle rifles send forth death-dealing bullets, and not for an instant does the fire slacken or cease."

In desperate effort the savages pour in a galling fire, but to no effect. The roar of the defending rifles ceases not, and with cries of rage the Indians break and turn. Even as they flee wildly for the woods the rifles of the corral bring them down, dotting the open with men and horses.

The result of this charge left the Indians puzzled and exasperated, and the little garrison confident and full of hope. Three men, including Lieutenant Jenness, had been killed, but the handful left hastily repaired their defences, reloaded their spare guns, and lay down to wait. To Red Cloud and his warriors that corral hid a mystery—how could those few white men pour in such an endless fire? They knew nothing then of the powers of the breech-loading Springfield, or of those extra rifles lying beside each soldier, ready to be snatched up in an instant. But they were not yet defeated; more determined than ever to wipe this white detachment from the earth, eager to revenge their dead, the whole force prepared to advance on foot, confident still of crushing the defenders of the corral by sheer force of numbers. Having stripped themselves of everything but arms and ammunition, seven hundred warriors stole forward under cover until they were within long range distance of the corral. Spreading out so as completely to surround

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this primitive fort, they opened a terrific fire from all sides. Crouching low in the shelter of the wagon boxes, the soldiers refused to reply, the corral remaining grimly silent.

Suddenly, all the Indians left alive, nearly three thousand in number, led in person by a nephew of Red Cloud, sprang to their feet, and with wild yells, dashed headlong forward. No sooner were they within short rifle range than the corral blazed again, the hidden men actually pouring bullets into the massed hordes, the steady fire never slackening for an instant. Flesh and blood could not stand such awful strain. Again and again the enraged braves swarmed forward, and once only, their desperate advance reached within a few feet of the corral; but the deadly fire withered them, and they were actually blown back from the flaming muzzles of the guns. Utterly demoralized and panic-stricken, the great mass broke, and fled beyond range. In the safety of the woods the chiefs rallied their braves, and led them forth again and again to the attack. Six times in three hours those warriors dashed forward, and were hurled back before the ceaseless rifles. The ground about the corral was ringed with Indians slain. Close beside the wagon boxes they were piled in heaps, and farther away they were scattered over the Plain. Unknown to those gallant defenders, whose ammunition was by now running low, the end had come, their fierce assailants had had enough of slaughter.

# THE GREAT PLAINS

## A Rescue Party from the Fort

Convinced that further attack was useless, believing that some horrible magic, some "bad medicine," protected those hidden white men, Red Cloud's sole remaining object was the removal of the Indian dead. To accomplish this his skirmishers went forward again, pouring a heavy fire into the corral. Under this cover, and protected by stout shields of buffalo-hide, warriors crept forward, attaching lariats to the bodies, and thus drawing them away. In this manner they succeeded in recovering the larger number, but had not completed the task, when suddenly a shell burst in their midst, and a rescuing party from the fort appeared in the open. The Indians at once retired.

## Estimate of the Slaughter

This defence of thirty-two men, poorly protected by entrenchments, against a well-armed force of three thousand is almost without parallel in history. Within the corral only three men were killed and two wounded. Not until a year after the fight was the Indian loss definitely ascertained, and then they acknowledged their killed and wounded to have been one thousand, one hundred and thirty-seven. This means that each man in the corral had stricken down at least thirty-six Indians. One of the frontiersmen told Colonel Dodge that he had kept eight guns hot to the hand for three hours. Almost all the water placed in the wagon boxes for emergencies of fire, was used to cool the heated

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guns. The tops of the wagon boxes were literally torn to pieces by the Indian bullets, but the men, lying low, were protected by gunny-sacks of corn placed on edge two deep on the inside of every box. At the point where the four sacks met was a two-inch auger hole through which the rifles were sighted. Two men defended each wagon box.

The next fall a new treaty was entered into with the Indians, and the post at Fort Kearney, which had witnessed such a stormy life, was abandoned, the troops being withdrawn. The savages at once burned it to the ground, and it was never reoccupied. But even this concession—almost open surrender—on the part of the Government failed to end the hostility of the Cheyennes and Sioux.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—THE FIGHT ON THE ARICKAREE

#### The Tribes Oppose the Building of the Railroad

**T**HE abandonment of forts, and the signing of treaties, brought no real end to hostilities on the Plains. Wider and wider the trouble seemed to spread, and it soon became evident that a defensive alliance existed between the fighting tribes east of the Rocky Mountains, which could be dissolved only by actual war. The necessity of striking hard blows and the campaigning over a broad section of territory became imperative. The building of the Union Pacific Railroad, now well under way, was the deep underlying cause for this fierce fighting spirit which had taken possession of the warriors of the Plains. They were making their last stand before the advance of civilization, and it was a desperate and bloody one.

#### Outrages

Immediately after the withdrawal of troops from the abandoned northern forts, bands of Sioux began raiding the line of railroad under construction, and overran the country southward into Colorado. They stirred the Arapahoes and

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

Southern Cheyennes into uniting with them, and thus spread destruction and death over a wide expanse. A few of the more atrocious deeds committed at this time will prove the justification of the army campaign which followed. August 4, two hundred Cheyennes, four Arapahoes, and twenty Sioux started out from Pawnee Fork. A few days later they were at a small settlement on the Saline, being kindly received; and they repaid that kindness with a treacherous attack. Two white men were killed, and several women captured and inhumanly treated. From here they crossed to the Solomon, destroyed the houses, killed thirteen men, and ravished all the women. The same horrors were continued along the sparse settlements of the Republican; but before news could be carried to Fort Harker, the nearest post, the band broke up and disappeared. The pursuing troops had a fight with the rear guard and rescued a few captive children.

Meanwhile the Governors of both Colorado and Kansas were reporting other outrages to the Washington authorities. Both threatened to call out State troops to defend their people. The Indians attacked settlements within twelve miles of Denver; they captured and burned a train at Pawnee Fork, killing, scalping, and torturing sixteen men; they attacked another train at the Cimarron Crossing, and compelled its abandonment. In one month, they killed or captured eighty-four settlers. Scarcely a day passed without a fresh story of out-



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rage. After laboring in vain for peace, and making earnest efforts to induce the tribes to return quietly to their reservations, General Sheridan, then commanding the Department of the Missouri, reluctantly decided that nothing excepting war would ever end the depredations and massacres. With characteristic energy he at once took the field in person. His first efforts were to subdue the Cheyennes, who were already in open rebellion under their two great war-chiefs Roman Nose, and Black Kettle. As it chanced, the first grapple came with Roman Nose.

### Colonel Forsyth and his Scouts

One of General Sheridan's earliest acts was to detail Colonel George A. ("Sandy") Forsyth, of his staff to the command of a band of scouts, to be organized for this special campaign from the ranks of well-known frontiersmen. As second in command he had Lieutenant Frederick H. Beecher. Within five days the fifty volunteers desired were enrolled. It was a remarkable body of men, nearly all veterans of the Civil War on one side or the other, and seasoned Plainsmen. J. H. Mooers was the surgeon; the first sergeant, W. H. H. McCall, had commanded a volunteer regiment; and the guide was Sharpe Grover, one of the most skilful on the Plains. Their equipment was simple but sufficient,—a blanket apiece, saddle and bridle, a lariat and picket-pin, a canteen, a haversack, a butcher knife, a Spencer repeating rifle (seven

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shots), a Colt's revolver (army size), and a hundred and forty rounds of rifle ammunition, and thirty rounds of revolver ammunition, per man. The pack train was limited to four mules bearing camp kettles, picks, and shovels, four thousand extra rounds of ammunition, some medicine, and extra rations of salt and coffee. Each officer and man carried seven days' cooked rations in his haversack.

### **They Follow a Band of Raiders to the Arickaree**

August 29, 1868, this body of scouts were sent forward, with orders to "move across the headwaters of Solomon [River] to Beaver Creek, thence down that Creek to Fort Wallace." They completed this trip without adventure, but on arriving at Fort Wallace they heard of an attack made the evening before, on a freighter's train thirteen miles away, in which two teamsters were killed. Leaving two of his men sick in the post hospital, Forsyth pressed forward swiftly, hoping to strike the trail of the Indians. This was picked up, followed all one day and part of the next, when it suddenly disappeared, the savages having scattered. For five days the men scouted in a wide circle, hoping to discover where the members of the band became united once more. In this effort they were finally successful, striking the trail again on the north bank of the Republican River. From here on it was like a beaten road, plainly bearing evidence of the passage of large numbers. But, in spite of expressed apprehension on the part of some of the men, Forsyth

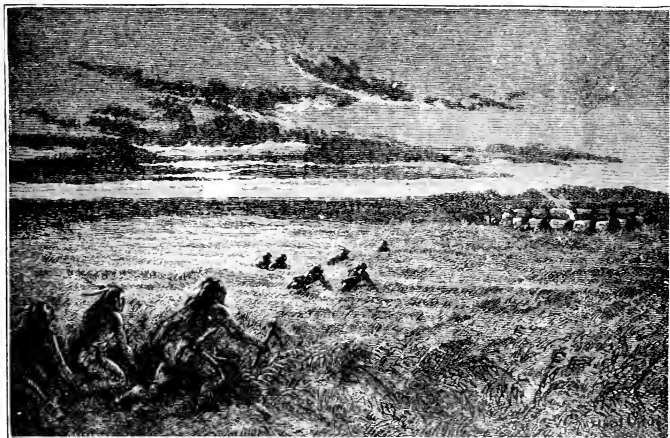
## THE GREAT PLAINS

and the veterans with him determined to press grimly on, anxious for a fight.

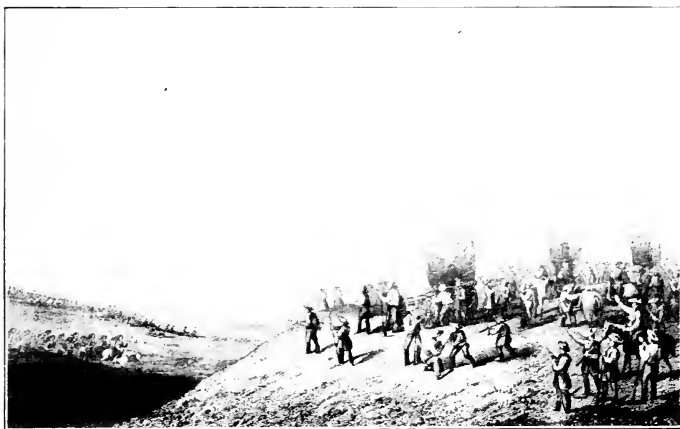
September 15, just before sunset, the little troop rode down through a ravine into a valley about two miles wide, through which ran a little river called the Arickaree. They made camp on the south bank. No Indians had been seen, but every man in the party believed them close at hand, and no precautions were neglected. The bed of the river was about one hundred and forty yards wide, the banks covered with wild plums, willows, and alders. The greater part of this river bed, owing to lack of rain at that season, was dry and hard, but for four or five yards about an island in the middle the water ran slowly with depth not exceeding a foot. This island, which must have been entirely submerged in time of high water, was now about twenty yards wide and sixty yards long, and its upper end arose perhaps two feet above the water level, being covered with a thick growth of stunted bushes; the lower end sloped to the edge of the water, and held one single cottonwood tree.

### They are Besieged on an Island

The night passed quietly, the guards were on the alert, and Forsyth made regular rounds to each post. In the early dawn, a band, creeping toward them through the grass, endeavored to stampede the horses, but the men were instantly on their feet, and drove back the invaders with a sharp fire. A few moments later, the command now drawn up in line

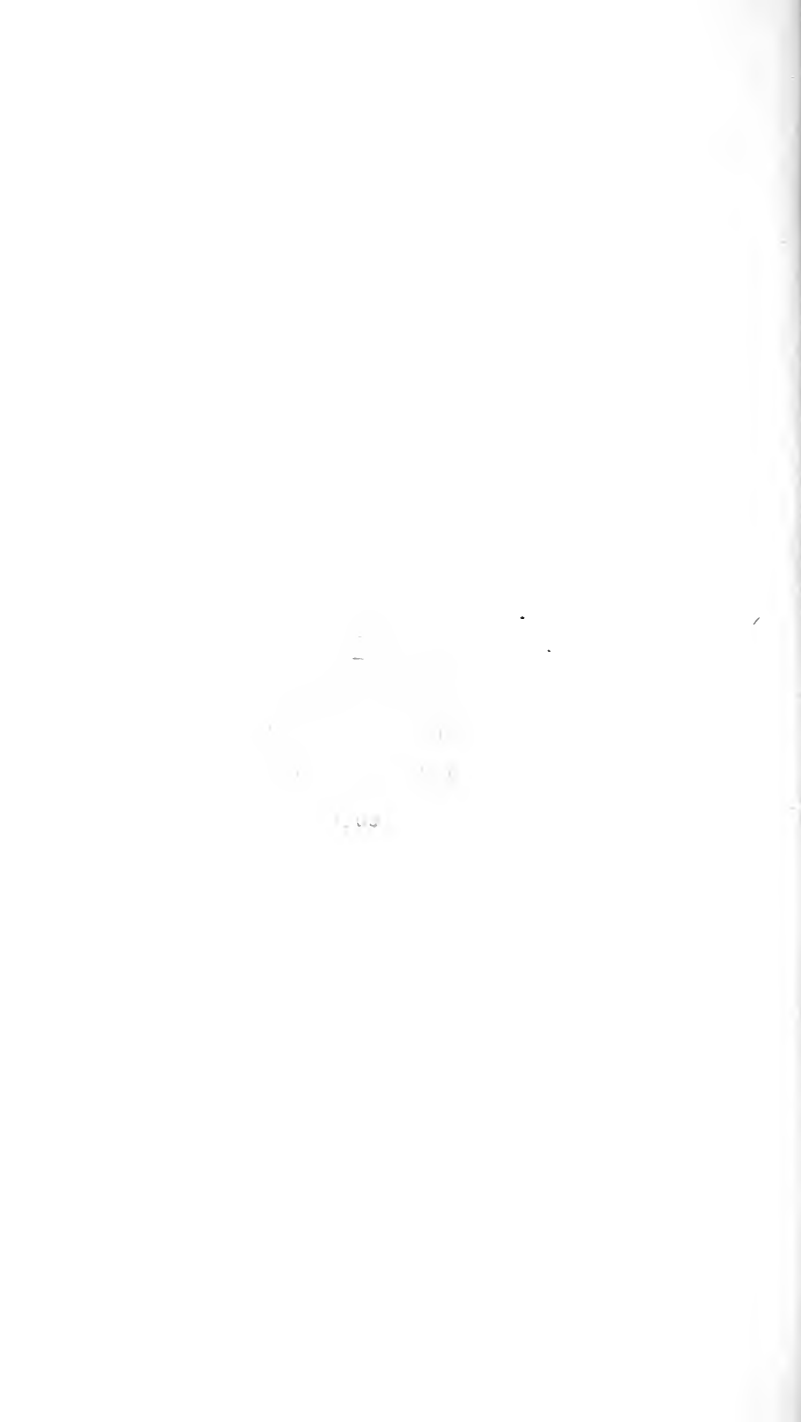


A NIGHT ATTACK UPON THE CAMP



AN EMIGRANT TRAIN PREPARING FOR DEFENCE

SCENES CHARACTERISTIC OF INDIAN ATTACKS



## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

ready for mounting, Grover suddenly gave a cry of surprise and pointed down the valley. It was such a sight as few white men have ever witnessed and lived to tell of it. In front, on right, and in rear the surrounding hills and valleys seemed fairly thronged with Indians. They appeared as if by magic. To the left alone did there seem opportunity for escape, but the very fact that an opening was left appeared to Forsyth like a cunning invitation to ambush. They wanted him to go in that direction, and therefore he instantly decided otherwise. He saw no place where his little handful might hope to stand against that encircling host, except upon the island. It was not much of a place for defence, but it was the one strategic spot within their reach. They must save their ammunition; all else could be abandoned,—medical stores, rations, everything, but not that. Pouring a heavy fire into the Indians, Forsyth ordered the retreat to the island under cover of the smoke. It was accomplished without loss. Protected by a squad of expert riflemen, the others crossed the river bed, tied their horses to the bushes about the edge of the island, and, dividing into squads, while some kept up a galling fire, under protection of which the rear-guard joined them, the remainder hastily set to work digging rifle-pits in the sand. They had nothing to do this with but tin cups, tin plates and bowie knives, yet they managed to scoop out one pit for each man, so placed as to defend the upper, higher end of the island. The pit Surgeon Mooers

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had dug was a little wider than the others, and, after walking about until certain that all his men were under cover, Forsyth took refuge there.

Finding their first effort at surprise had failed, the Indians exhibited considerable military skill in planning for attack on the entrenched whites. Roman Nose, who was in command, had with him about a thousand warriors. Their squaws and children were sent back to the bluffs, whence they could view the fight without danger; then dismounted braves were sent forward to the banks of the river bed, and ordered to sweep the exposed island with rifle fire. As these banks were higher than the island, the Indian riflemen had great advantage, pouring in a plunging fire, compelling the whites to dig deeper and throw up hasty entrenchments to rear as well as front. At first the horses suffered most, but as these were shot down the bullets began to reach the men. Several of the scouts were killed, others wounded, some mortally. Dr. Mooers was hit in the forehead, and although he remained alive three days, was blind and speechless. Forsyth was struck three times, once in the right thigh, once in the forehead, and a bullet smashed the bone of his leg between knee and ankle. His pain was excruciating, but was borne without a murmur, and not for an instant did he fail to retain command.

### They Drive Back the Indians

Realizing the deadliness of this rifle fire, Roman Nose determined to charge with his horsemen. Forming them, five hundred strong, behind the

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cover of a bend in the stream, he led them forward in person, mounted upon a magnificent chestnut horse. The warriors behind him trotted up the river bed in open order, forming eight ranks and extending from bank to bank. Naked, except for cartridge belt and box, riding saddleless, yelling fiercely, their rifles flung forward, the frenzied riders dashed on recklessly, being determined to sweep that island with one headlong charge. But Forsyth and his men were ready. The withdrawal of the horsemen around the bend had been sufficient warning to these border fighters of what was coming. Now they waited grimly on their knees, every deadly rifle poised, for the single word of command. Forsyth, barely able to move, pulled himself to a sitting posture, so that he could see over the ridge of sand. The thunder of hoofs was almost on them when he shouted "Now!" In one awful volley the levelled rifles blazed; again and again, almost without cessation, the storm of lead swept into the head of that advance. Down went horses and men, but they came on in a seemingly resistless torrent. Not until the sixth volley tore through those bleeding, staggering, blinded ranks, did they break and turn aside. It was then Roman Nose and his horse went crashing down, shot to pieces at the very edge of the island. Scarcely three feet behind were his horsemen, but the frontiersmen poured in their seventh volley, and all who lived scurried away, hugging their horses' sides as they swept down the stream out of the zone of fire.



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### Lieutenant Beecher Slain

But though driven back, their great chief killed, the river bed strewn with slain, the Indians were not yet defeated. Again their riflemen lined the bank and concentrated their fire on the island. Lieutenant Beecher was struck, but succeeded in dragging himself over to Forsyth and said quietly, "I have my death wound, General; I am shot in the side, and dying."

"Oh, no, Beecher, no. It can't be as bad as that."

"Yes, good-night," and he sank into unconsciousness.

At two o'clock the warriors tried another charge of horsemen, but this time their rush broke a hundred yards from the island. At six o'clock they made a third and more desperate attempt, some actually reaching the pits, but were hurled back with fearful loss.

### Sufferings of the Besieged

When nightfall came the scattered white defenders were able to count up their fatalities and clearly comprehend the situation. The scene was one of surpassing horror. Out of fifty-one officers and men twenty-three had been hurt, six dead or dying, and eight critically wounded. The suffering of the injured was pitiful, and, with no medical supplies, and the surgeon dying, the men were unable to aid them. Water could be had by digging down through the sand, but there were no rations. The

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men sustained life by cutting strips of flesh from the bodies of the dead horses. With night came a heavy rain, and the scouts dug deeper in stern preparation for the morrow.

Under the cover of darkness two men were selected to try to get through the Indian lines to Fort Wallace, one hundred miles away. Every man able to travel volunteered for this desperate service, but the two chosen were Trudeau, a veteran plainsman, and Jack Stillwell, a lad of nineteen. Taking off their boots, and walking backwards down the bed of the river, they began their fearful trip, and, not until long days after did those comrades left behind know their fate, and the story of successful achievement. With the early morning came a renewed attack by the Indians, who had expected Forsyth and his men to attempt a retreat during the night. This was easily repulsed, and the savages settled down for a siege, closely investing the island, and keeping up a constant rifle fire from the protection of the higher banks.

The men were now facing starvation. The weather was extremely hot, and the sufferings of the wounded were frightful. They still had horse-flesh, but it was rapidly becoming unfit for use. Not for an instant did they dare relax their vigilance. All day long they lay under heavy rifle fire. That night two other scouts were sent out with a message for help, but were unable to get through the Indian lines, and came creeping back just before daybreak. The third day dragged along under the same

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conditions, the slightest exposure of a white man the signal for an Indian volley. That night the two message-bearers sent forth succeeded in getting away safe. The dawn of the fourth day disclosed the departure of all the squaws and children from the distant hills, but the warriors still remained watchful and eager to kill. Forsyth's wound in the leg was so painful that he cut the bullet out himself with a razor, and found great relief. Men, crawling cautiously about, their slightest exposure endangering their lives, ministered to the injured as best they could.

### Arrival of a Relief Column

The fifth day brought them nearly to the verge of despair, for the horse-flesh was by now putrid and unfit to eat. An unlucky coyote wandered onto the island and was killed. During the day the Indian fire died down; but when Forsyth was lifted up on a blanket, believing the savages had retreated, a sudden fusilade from the bank caused one of the men to drop his corner of the blanket, and the commander fell upon his wounded leg, injuring it severely. When the sixth day came, it was evident the Indians had finally withdrawn, although there was still some likelihood that they hoped thus to lure forth the little garrison and ambuscade them in the hills. Forsyth, however, believed their disappearance was final, and he called his men about him. Then he bade all those able to travel to start for Fort Wallace, as it was

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uncertain whether any of their messengers had got through. As for himself and the other wounded, they would have to stay there and take their chances, until help arrived. This proposition was at first received in surprised silence, then with indignant refusal from the lips of every man. Not one left the island. For two days longer, with nothing to eat but wild plums, they held their rifle-pits, knowing from an Indian vedette on the bluffs, that they were under constant observation. On the morning of the ninth day the relief column came, consisting of Colonel Carpenter and a troop of the Tenth Cavalry. Forsyth's scouts had fought the greatest fight in the history of the West.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS—THE SURPRISE OF BLACK KETTLE

#### General Sheridan Determines on a Winter Campaign

**T**HE decisive defeat administered to Roman Nose's band, and the death of their leader, ended their raids as an armed body. But Black Kettle still remained in the field with a much larger force, now recruited by those warriors who had survived the fight on the Arickaree. Moving southward, this force became the source of much trouble along the Arkansas, and the Santa Fe Trail. Hoping to strike these savages a severe and unexpected blow, General Sheridan decided to organize a winter campaign against their villages. Campaigning on the Great Plains in winter was so filled with danger that heretofore it had never been attempted by troops operating in any considerable number. The terrible storms which swept over the level country, as well as the difficulty of finding subsistence for animals at that season, rendered such an experiment perilous in the extreme. Yet it possessed advantages also. The Indians felt so absolutely safe at this season as to take little precaution against surprise. Firmly convinced that no troops could operate under such conditions as a Western winter presented, the savages sought some secluded valley, pitched their tepees, and then rested in

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security, awaiting the coming of spring. It was knowledge of this Indian confidence that determined Sheridan's resolve, even against the advice of others. Here was opportunity for surprise, for the striking of a crushing blow when least expected.

### Need for Speedy Action to Stop Outrages

That there was abundant need for such action is evidenced by the incomplete statistics relating to Indian outrages in this department of the Missouri during the latter half of 1868. While during this period only eleven Indians were reported as having been killed, and one wounded, one hundred and fifty-seven whites were left dead on the Plain; fifty-seven wounded, of whom forty-one were scalped; fourteen women outraged and later murdered; one man, four women, and twenty-four children made prisoners; one thousand, six hundred and twenty-seven horses, mules, and cattle stolen; twenty-four ranches or settlements destroyed; eleven stagecoaches attacked; and four wagon trains annihilated. And this record is of settlers, not soldiers. That the latter did not escape unscathed was shown by the killing of Lieutenant Kidder and thirteen men of the Second Cavalry, while scouting south of the Platte.

As winter came on reports reached Sheridan that Black Kettle's band had gone south and established a permanent winter camp somewhere along the Washita. The General at once prepared for action. Establishing supply depots at Monument Creek in

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southern Kansas, near the headwaters of the North Canadian, each well garrisoned by troops who were ordered to scout thoroughly all the surrounding country, the main force destined to active operation in the field were rendezvoused at the junction of Beaver Creek and the North Canadian River, in Indian Territory. This point was about one hundred miles south of Fort Dodge, and became known as Camp Supply. Here were consolidated eleven troops of the Seventh United States Cavalry, four companies of infantry, and a newly recruited volunteer organization, the Eleventh Kansas Cavalry. George A. Custer, Lieutenant-colonel of the Seventh, was assigned to the command.

### Custer Begins his March

Custer started on his dangerous march at four o'clock the morning of November 23. The thermometer was below zero, a foot of snow on the ground, and snow still falling furiously. To Sheridan's question as to what he thought of it, the gallant cavalry leader replied instantly, "It's all right; we can move, the Indians can't." The storm as they advanced increased to a blizzard, and the Indian guides lost their way, but the officers led the band by resorting to their pocket compasses, and finally the patient, suffering column made camp on Wolf Creek, after a march of fifteen miles. The heavily laden wagon train also succeeded in getting through the storm, and reached camp soon after the arrival of the troops.

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

The next morning the blizzard had somewhat abated, but the thermometer stood seven degrees below zero, with eighteen inches of snow covering the prairie. All that day and the next the troopers struggled on up the valley of Wolf Creek. By the twenty-seventh they were upon the Canadian, and here Major Elliott, with three troops, was sent on a scout up the valley seeking some Indian trail as a guide. The others put in several hours' hard labor in getting their wagon train across the river through the floating ice; but by eleven o'clock all were once more out upon the level Plains. Here one of Elliott's men joined them with news that he had discovered the fresh track of an Indian war party, fully one hundred and fifty strong, and had already followed it south across the river.

### He Reaches the Indian Camp

Promptly leaving the slower-moving wagon train under heavy guard to follow as rapidly as possible, Custer pushed out with his remaining cavalrymen to overtake Elliott. Each trooper carried one hundred rounds of ammunition, besides coffee, hard bread, and a small amount of forage. The weather had moderated somewhat, and the little column took a direct line across the open Plain, the leading troop being constantly relieved from the exhaustive labor of breaking a passage through the deep snow. At nine o'clock that evening they made connection with Elliott, and the weary troopers and their mounts enjoyed an hour's rest under the steep



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banks of a creek. Then they were at it again, following the trail by moonlight, the Osages in advance under California Joe and a scout named Corbin. There was a feeling throughout the entire force that the hostiles could not be far distant, and every movement was made with the utmost caution. Not a loud word was spoken, and strict orders were given the men against lighting a match or smoking a pipe. Suddenly one of the Indian scouts reported that he smelt fire, and the column instantly halted while the Osages crept stealthily forward to investigate. Half a mile ahead a small camp-fire, recently deserted, yet smouldered in a bunch of timber. There was reason to believe it had been kindled by Indian boys herding ponies, and if so the village could not be very far away. Again the troopers moved silently forward on the trail, more cautious than ever.

### The Plan of Attack

It was past midnight when, unseen and unchallenged, the half frozen men were suddenly halted by the excited scouts. Out of the darkness just ahead of where they sat their horses, sounded the noise of a barking dog, and the tinkling of a bell evidently upon the neck of some leader of a grazing pony herd. Instantly it was realized that, as yet undiscovered, they had stolen upon the winter camp of the hostiles. Custer silently led his officers to a ridge whence they could look down upon the unsuspecting camp below, now dimly revealed in

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the moonlight. Stealthily creeping back to the waiting troopers, who were sitting half frozen in their saddles, the cavalry leader made rapid preparations for an attack before daylight. The entire command of eight hundred men was divided into four nearly equal detachments. Two of these moved out at once to make a circuitous march of several miles until they should find station on the opposite side of the village. They moved to the left, and succeeded admirably, creeping within a short half-mile of the sleeping camp undiscovered. One of the other detachments turned to the right and found concealment behind a small clump of timber, while Custer with the small number of remaining troopers held to the original position on the main trail. The signal which was to send all these separate bodies crashing to the centre was to be the charge blown by the regimental trumpeter with Custer's detachment.

### Waiting for the Signal to Charge

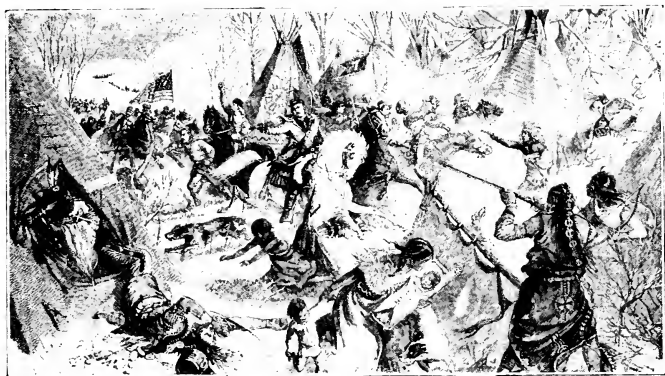
For four long, miserable hours the men on the main trail waited silently to give their comrades time in which to get ready. It was very cold, but the half-frozen troopers were not allowed to make the slightest movement, not even to swing their arms, or stamp their feet. They stood like statues, each man at his horse's head, the capes of their overcoats drawn down over their faces to protect them from the wind. At the first gray tinge of dawn every trooper was alert and ready. Over-

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coats were taken off and strapped to the saddles, carbines loaded and slung, revolvers examined, and saddles carefully recinched. Then the whispered command to mount passed down the thin line, and each trooper gathered his reins taut and waited. As Custer rode forward to the top of the concealing crest he saw before him, in the dim light of early dawn, not five hundred yards away, a great Indian village stretching for a quarter of a mile along the north bank of the Washita. Already wreaths of smoke were floating out of the tops of some of the tepees. As he gazed a rifle shot suddenly rang out from the other end of the camp, and instantly he gave the order, "Sound the Charge."

### Black Kettle Slain

As the piercing blare burst forth, the marvellous regimental band, which accompanied them, swung into the Seventh's fighting-tune of "Garry-Owen," and the troopers broke forth into mad gallop, cheering wildly as they spurred straight at the startled village. Three other trumpets echoed the first, and column after column dashed from out their coverts, riding gallantly for the tepees. Surprised as they were, the Indians rallied to swift, hard, desperate battle. Almost with the first volley Black Kettle went down to death, but his warriors fought on, those who escaped from the village taking refuge behind rocks, trees, and under the river bank, while the others, hidden within the tepees, fired at the charging troops. Little Rock was the Chief now in



# SCENES OF INDIAN WARFARE ON THE GREAT PLAINS

AN ATTACK ON THE OVERLAND STAGE — CUSTER'S CHARGE ON BLACK  
KETTLE'S CAMP — THE SCOUT'S LAST SHOT



## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

command, and Custer soon realized that he had serious work ahead with his small force. The number of Indians seemed constantly to increase, and it was soon learned that this village of Black Kettle's was merely one of many, the others being located down the stream, yet all within a distance of ten miles. All the hostile tribes of the southern Plains — Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas, Comanches, and even some Apaches — were gathered there battling those few daring troopers of the Seventh.

### Custer's Victory

This overwhelming force soon compelled Custer to assume the defensive. At least two thousand warriors fronted him. After an hour's hard fighting, during which the Seventh lost a number of officers and men, and the Indians had one hundred and three killed, Custer dismounted his men, and prepared to resist a threatened charge. It came promptly, the advancing warriors being led by Little Raven, an Arapahoe, Satanta, a Kiowa, and Little Rock, a Cheyenne. The troops made desperate resistance, but already their ammunition ran low. Suddenly a four-mule wagon came dashing recklessly through the Indian lines. The quartermaster, Major Bell, was driving, and he had with him a small escort. Before the startled warriors could rally to stop him, the fiercely galloping mules had attained the thin line of soldiers, and a fresh supply of ammunition was passed from man to man. Inspired by this deed of heroism, with their cart-

## THE GREAT PLAINS

ridge belts again filled, the troopers sprang forward with an impetuosity which drove their assailants headlong down the valley, Little Rock being killed in the flight.

Nothing remained now for Custer's command but to get away in as good order as possible. About them was an overwhelming mass of savages capable of crushing them to death when they again rallied and consolidated. Burning Black Kettle's village, taking their captives along, but turning loose the pony herd, the troopers executed a bold movement. With flankers out and skirmishers in advance, they rode directly down the river toward the congregating body of hostiles. Seeking to make these believe that the Seventh was only the advance of a much larger force, every flag was unfurled and the band ordered to play. The audacity of this strange movement struck terror into the hearts of the warriors, and they broke and fled. As darkness descended the little column of horsemen turned suddenly aside, and, striking the old trail, marched rapidly for Camp Supply.

### Major Elliott and his Band Surrounded and Slain

During the heat of the fight near the village Major Elliott, with Sergeant-Major Kennedy and thirteen men was seen in close pursuit of a party of Indians. When roll-call came after the battle they were still missing, and, although searching parties were sent out in every direction as far as it was safe to proceed, not the slightest trace could be

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

found. Not until the tenth of the following December was the mystery of their fate revealed. Then another campaigning column, again under Custer's command, moved along the valley of the Washita, and found their remains. Custer's report reads:

"The bodies of Elliott and his little band, with but a single exception, were found lying within a circle not exceeding twenty yards in diameter. We found them exactly as they fell, except that their barbarous foe had stripped and mutilated the bodies in the most savage manner. No words were needed to tell how desperate had been the struggle before they were finally overwhelmed."

### The Story as Told by Indians

Later from the lips of Indians the story of that tragedy was given fully. Surrounded and cut off from all possibility of rescue, the little band stood back to back, and died fighting to the last. The one who lived longest was Sergeant-Major Kennedy. Wounded, his ammunition exhausted, the Indians sought to capture him for torture. Kennedy, being an officer, wore a sword, and as a chief came forward pretending peace, hoping thus to cause the helpless soldier to surrender, the desperate man suddenly ran him through. In the quick rage of the warriors Kennedy received twenty bullets in his body, and thus there came to him a merciful death.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS — THE INCIDENTS OF INDIAN WAR

Colonel Carpenter in Bivouac at Beaver Creek

**W**HILE the fierce engagements on the Aricka-ree and the Washita took much of the warlike spirit out of the Plains Indians, there was little rest to the army on the frontier during 1868-69. It was a continuous campaign winter and summer, enlivened by numerous minor but spirited engagements, and individual adventures well worth the telling. Three weeks after the rescue of Forsyth and his scouts, Colonel Carpenter, who led the rescuing party on that occasion, had a severe battle on the banks of Beaver Creek. The Fifth Cavalry were in the field following a trail discovered near the South Fork of the Republican. A day or two after the Fifth had disappeared, Colonel Carr, who was in command of that regiment but had been on detached service, reached Fort Wallace, and Carpenter, with troops H and I, Tenth Cavalry (colored) was ordered to escort him, until they made connection with the Fifth. They left Fort Wallace on the morning of October 14, and the next afternoon went into bivouac on Beaver Creek. Seeing plenty of fresh Indian signs as they advanced, the little squad of cavalymen kept on down the stream for thirty miles without striking the trail of those

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white troopers they were seeking. There being no pack outfits at Wallace, they were obliged to carry their supplies in wagons, of which they had eleven, and these greatly delayed the march.

### He Repels an Indian Raid

It was early on the morning of the fifteenth when a scouting party under Captain Graham was suddenly attacked by Indians who dashed over a hill in their rear. A hot fight ensued, during which the Captain was wounded and unhorsed; but Carpenter came forward so swiftly with reinforcements, that the assailants were driven off. Then the entire body of troops consolidated about the wagons. The surrounding Indians increasing in number, these wagons were arranged in double column, and started forward across the open Plain, where the savages could find no cover. The advance, however, was slow, and the fire almost continuous until early in the afternoon. Then fully six hundred warriors massed themselves for a charge. Realizing what was coming Carpenter hurried his teams to the summit of a small knoll, where he hastily formed a wagon corral, and, under that cover, made effective defence. The Indians were driven back with considerable loss, and finally withdrew without attempting another attack.

### Colonel Carr Raids an Indian Village

Colonel Eugene A. Carr, who during this fight at Beaver Creek gallantly wielded a rifle beside the

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black soldiers of Carpenter's command, later led the way in a brilliant attack on the camp of Tall Bull at Summit Springs. Carr had with him on this occasion five troops of his own regiment, the Fifth Cavalry, and was guided by W. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill). Tall Bull was, after Black Kettle, the most ruthless raider of the Plains. Learning the location of his camp, Carr marched his men one hundred and fifty miles in four days, and succeeded in drawing his troopers up into battle-line, hidden within a ravine, not more than twelve hundred yards from the unsuspecting village. With the sound of the charge the impetuous cavalymen swept forward resistlessly, and in a few moments the fight was over. Fifty-two Indians, including Tall Bull, were killed, and many horses and mules captured. Two captured white women in the camp were killed before the troopers could rescue them.

### Two Officers Chased by a Great Band

In the Summer of 1864 Captain Henry Booth, inspecting officer, and Lieutenant Hallowell, Ninth Wisconsin Battery, had an adventure along the Santa Fe Trail which neither was likely soon to forget. They were inspecting posts, and travelled in a light wagon drawn by a team of mules. Their escort was Company L, Eleventh Kansas. Reaching Walnut Creek without sight of any Indians, the two officers despatched their escort in advance the next morning, but were not able themselves to get away until three hours later. They had driven five or

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

six miles from the Walnut, and were within a few hundred yards of what is now the Court House Square in the present city of Great Bend, when a large number of Indians suddenly appeared. Instantly the mules were wheeled about and started on a run for Walnut Creek. Hallowell held the reins and wielded the whip, while Booth crawled to the back of the wagon, and began shooting through a hole in the cover at their pursuers. It was a wild, mad race over the prairie; both men were wounded, and the mules struck repeatedly with arrows. The latter, thoroughly frightened, ran away, yet Hallowell managed to guide them in the right direction. Time and again the red devils charged up to the jumping wheels, but Booth's revolver was always there blazing in their faces. Once they got so close that Hallowell slashed them across the faces with his whip. It was a neck to neck race clear to the Walnut, but the officers won it, although both were severely wounded. Hallowell was compelled to have several arrows extracted from his body.

### Skirmishes during the Building of the Railroads

These are but a few from the many exciting incidents occurring at this time throughout the length and breadth of the Great Plains. There were almost constant attacks on wagon trains, and the smaller bodies of scouting troops. The advance of the builders of the Union Pacific and Kansas Pacific Railroads witnessed a continued series of skirmishes. The graders durst not leave their camps except

## THE GREAT PLAINS

under armed protection, and any straggler was almost certain of death, even in sight of his helpless comrades. On more than one occasion unfortunate captives were inhumanly tortured within easy view, although beyond rifle range. So widely scattered, yet so numerous were these outrages, that the complete story can never be told, nor is there satisfactory record of even the part played in this Great Plains tragedy by the army. Few of their fights reached the dignity of battle; it was a campaign of hard marches, of ceaseless vigilance, of unending peril, of small detachments riding swiftly and striking fiercely at an ever scattering foe.

### Sheridan's Report of the Second Expedition to Washita

How the final result, a brief, unsatisfactory peace, was attained can be best learned from an extract from General Sheridan's report made in November, 1869. It relates particularly to the second expedition to the Washita, and reads:

"The snow was still on the ground and the weather very cold, but the officers and men were cheerful, although the men had only shelter tents. We moved due south until we struck the Washita, near Custer's fight of November 27th, having crossed the main Canadian with the thermometer about eighteen degrees below zero.

After reaching the Washita, my intention was to take up the trail of the Indians and follow it. We rested one day and made an examination of the ground; found the bodies of Major Elliott and his small party, and examined the Indian camps or villages which had been abandoned when General Custer struck Black Kettle's band. They extended about twelve or thirteen miles down the river, and from the appearance of things they

## THE ARMY ON THE PLAINS

had fled in the greatest haste, abandoning provision, robes, cooking utensils, and every species of property, and it appeared to me they must have at least begun to realize that winter was not going to give them security.

“On the next day we started down the Washita, following the Indian trail; but finding so many deep ravines and cañons, I thought we would move out on the divide; but a blinding snowstorm coming on, and fearing to get lost with a large command and trains of wagons on a treeless prairie without water, we were forced back to the banks of the Washita, where we at least could get wood and water. Next day we continued down the river, following the trail of the Indians, and crossed numerous ravines by digging and bridging with pioneer parties. This was continued until the evening of the sixteenth [December], when we came to the vicinity of the Indians — principally Kiowas. They did not dream that any soldiers could operate in such cold and inclement weather, and we marched down on them before they knew of our presence in the country; after night they saw our fires, and by means of relays communicated with General Hazen, and obtained a letter from him saying that the Kiowas were friendly. I had just followed their trail from Custer’s battlefield, and a portion of this band had just come from Texas, where they had murdered and plundered in the most barbarous manner; while in the previous spring their outrages on the Texas border are too horrible to relate, one item of which is that, in returning to their villages, fourteen of the poor little captive children were frozen to death.

. . . . .

“The Cheyennes broke their promise and did not come in, so I ordered General Custer to move against them; this he did, and came on the Cheyennes on the head waters of Red River, apparently moving north. It is possible they were on their way to Camp Supply, as in some of the conversations I had with Little Robe I had declared that if they did not get into the Fort Cobb reservation within a certain time they would not be received there, but would be received at Camp Supply; this was because I expected to stay only for a limited time at Fort Cobb, intending to return to Camp Supply.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

Custer found them in a very forlorn condition, and could have destroyed, I think, most of the tribe, certainly their villages, but contented himself with taking their renewed promise to come into Camp Supply, and obtained from them two white women whom they held as captives. The most of the tribe fulfilled this latter promise so far as coming into the vicinity of Camp Supply and communicating with the commanding officer; but Tall Bull's band again violated the promise made, and went north to the Republican, where he joined a party of Sioux, who, on the thirteenth of May, 1869, were attacked and defeated with heavy loss, whereupon the whole tribe moved into Camp Supply.

"Meantime, while the Arapahoes and Cheyennes were negotiating with me to surrender, the Quahrada or Staked Plains Comanches sent a delegation over to Bascom, offering to surrender themselves, under the expectation, perhaps, that they could get better terms there than with me; but General Getty arrested the delegation, which was ordered to Fort Leavenworth, and finally returned to their people on condition that they would deliver themselves up on the reservation at Medicine Bluff or Fort Sill. This was complied with, and I am now able to report that there has been a fulfilment of all the conditions which we had in view when we commenced our winter's campaign last November — namely, punishment was inflicted; property destroyed; the Indians disabused of the idea that winter would bring security; and all the tribes south of the Platte forced on to the reservations set apart for them by the Government, where they are in a tangible shape for the good work of civilization, education, and religious instruction.

"I can not speak too highly of the patient and cheerful conduct of the troops under my command; they were many times pinched by hunger and numbed by cold, sometimes living in holes below the surface of the prairie — dug to keep them from freezing; at other times pursuing the savages, and living on the flesh of mules. In all these trying conditions the troops were always cheerful and willing, and the officers full of *esprit*."

## PART III. OCCUPATION

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### CHAPTER I

#### THE BEGINNING OF SETTLEMENT

##### Trading-Posts Built on the Missouri

**P**ERMANENT occupancy of this country of the Great Plains can be dated from the early days of the fur-traders. While individual traders and free trappers were probably first in the field, and carried their small packs down the rivers to St. Louis, where they sold them to Eastern dealers, yet close upon their heels came partnerships and organized companies. The latter soon discovered that it was far more profitable to maintain established posts, to which the surrounding Indians might easily travel and exchange their season's catch of furs for other articles of value. Such posts were built all along the west side of the Missouri, and for some miles up those tributary streams cleaving the prairies of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. Differing somewhat in size, and in importance of equipment, all these earlier fur-trading establishments had much in common. A few, those which were largest and erected in the midst of hostile tribes, or as centres for the supply of minor posts, were well fortified, surrounded with strong palisades, heavily manned by organized fighting men, and, in one or two instances in the warlike Sioux country, even



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surmounted by small cannon. But the great majority consisted only of a simple trading-store, with a few necessary buildings in which the employees lived. Isolated for years from all contact with civilization, and without even a visit to the East, surrounded by a savage and oftentimes hostile population, their environment the vast Plains, their business merely barter, the existence of these lonely men became a dull, colorless routine, relieved only by such adventures as arose from daily contact with wild life.

### Their Development into Settlements

But this was the beginning of permanent settlement, for each trading-post required employees, the number varying with the importance of the post. There were the trader and his clerk, wood-cutters and hay-makers, who were also boatmen upon occasion, probably a few white trappers under contract, with a worker or two in wood and iron. Sometimes, as at Fort Lisa, opposite Council Bluffs, and some others of those larger posts up the river, women braved the wilderness to be with the men they loved. Certain posts became favorite resting-places for free trappers, while others had a large number of paid hunters in their employ. Proper care for such demanded the building of houses, usually of logs, sometimes of earth, or even stone, and the gradual development of the Indian trading-house into a general store, where white as well as red could find their necessities. The requirements of the frontier always included an abundance of "red liquor," and

## THE BEGINNING OF SETTLEMENT

the hardy dispenser thereof was not long delayed in coming to the rescue of the thirsty. So, little by little, most of these earlier trading-posts changed into ugly, straggling settlements, their inhabitants at first mere wanderers, the faces changing with each season; as one disappeared into the unknown, another came drifting out of it to fill the vacancy. Roustabouts from the river boats, tired or dissatisfied voyageurs, hunters from off the Plains, adventurers, vagabonds, the scum of the frontier, came and went, yet always a few lingered on in stolid content, until out from the great East began to arrive those first daring settlers of a new country, with wives and children, horses and ploughs, seeking a permanent home where land was cheap, and where manhood counted for more than dollars.

### The Settlements Become Towns

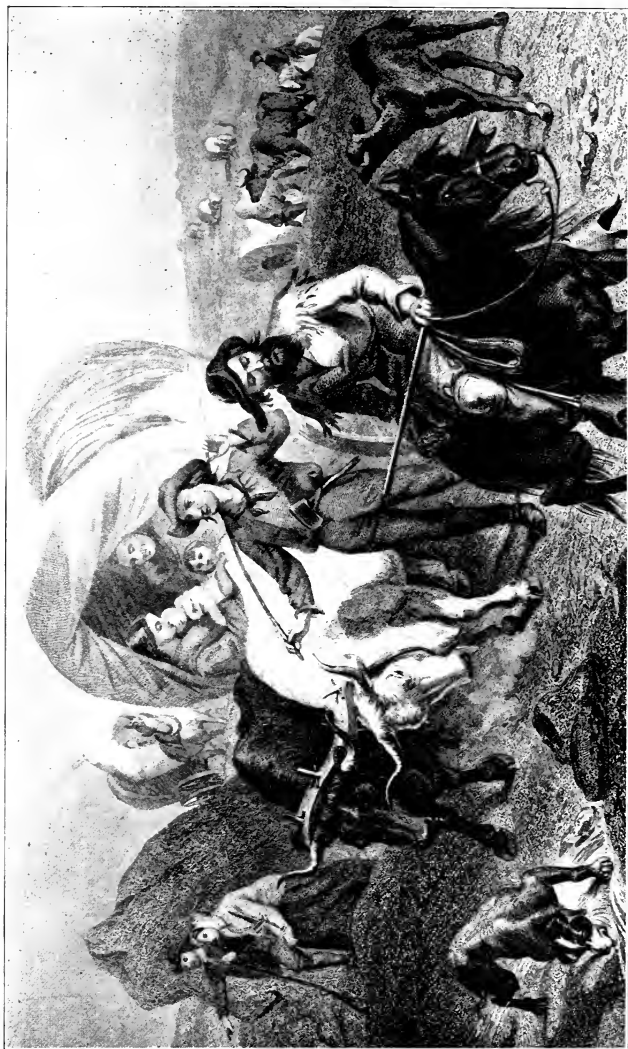
This was, in brief, the story of the beginning, the tale of a hundred towns now dotting the western banks of the Missouri, or looking down in peaceful content upon the waters of the Kansas, the Platte, the Niobrara, and many another stream between—the Indian trader, the wanderer, the settler; the gradual change from lonely post to prosperous village. The later advance westward was fairly rapid for the first one hundred and fifty miles. For that distance the prairies were inviting, the growth of grasses and timber along the bottoms gave abundant promise of other crops, the rainfall seemed sufficient, and the Indian tribes remained peaceful.

## THE GREAT PLAINS

Everything in nature urged the settlers onward to possess this goodly land. Yet they came in no crowds, for there was still much vacant country in the East. Only a few, the more adventurous and those loving the wild frontier life, pressed across the wooded hills of Missouri, or the rolling pastures of Iowa, to make settlement on the untried prairies. They were bold hearts who first found passage over the yellow flood, and established their homes in the heart of the wilderness.

### Early Settlers in Kansas and Nebraska

These first comers clung close to the stream valleys and the productive bottom lands. Led by prejudices engendered in the experiences of the East, they shunned the open prairie, holding it as of little value. In the timber by the river's edge, or in the midst of those small groves common to the country, they built their log huts, and led lives of privation, hardship, and occasional peril. Yet constantly was this thin skirmish line advancing still farther into the unknown, and gaining new recruits from the East. Travellers' published letters, the reports of explorers, private messages to friends, all served to increase steadily the inflowing tide. Soldiers whose terms of service had made them familiar with the country settled there; hunters, charmed with the rare beauty of this prairie land, became permanent residents; and the trader was ever close at hand with his stock of goods.



EMIGRANTS ON THE TRAIL

*From an engraving by Darley*

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# THE BEGINNING OF SETTLEMENT

## Organization into Territories

There was, however, very little permanent white settlement in either Nebraska or Kansas until after 1854, at which date these Territories were legally organized. Previous to this the entire region had been designated merely as the "Indian country," and its population consisted of little more than wandering trappers and hunters, scattered fur-traders with their few employees, and those men interested in the Santa Fe trade. Yet as soon as these Territories were formally thrown open to settlement, the rush across the border began. The local census in 1855 credits Kansas with a population of 8,501, which increased in five years to 107,206. In Nebraska the growth was less remarkable, its population in 1855 being 4,494, and in 1860, 28,441. In both cases the settlements were almost totally confined to the river bottoms, and within a comparatively short distance of the Missouri.

## Influence of the Santa Fe Trade and the Mormon Hegira

The Santa Fe trade had much influence on the early settlement of Kansas; and the Mormon hegira, together with the opening of the Oregon Trail, on that of Nebraska. The more rapid development of the southern Territory can also be traced to the struggle against slavery bringing to Kansas soil ardent sympathizers with the North and the South, respectively, in the fiercely raging controversy. While the main outfitting of the caravans bound for Santa

## THE GREAT PLAINS

Fe occurred at Independence, Missouri, the necessities of the trade early developed a considerable settlement at Council Grove. This point was nearly one hundred and fifty miles west of the starting place, and, being on the edge of the hostile and perilous Indian country, became utilized for refitting in final preparation for the more serious advance. Here was a thickly wooded bottom, half a mile to a mile in width, of indefinite length, and affording a great variety of excellent timber. Settlers found their way here at a very early date, some among them being skilled workmen. Round Grove, thirty-five miles from Independence, was also a rendezvous of caravans, and resulted in a small settlement. Where these first trails were compelled to cross considerable streams enterprising ferrymen quickly established themselves, and in a few years a store appeared, with the rude beginnings of a village. Topeka was thus begun from Papin's Ferry.

### Squatters along the Trails

The opening of the Oregon Trail left scattered squatters along its way beside the Vermilion, the Blue, and the Platte, but so far apart as to be scarcely noticeable. These men, except the operators of ferries, lived principally by hunting, and became much like their red neighbors in both customs and appearance. Not a few coöperated with the latter in raids upon the passing emigrant trains. The exodus of the Mormons along the Platte Valley likewise left a slight population in favorable

## THE BEGINNING OF SETTLEMENT

locations along their route, but in neither case were those settlers propagators of civilization. They were the mere scum of the frontier, living from hand to mouth, little better than the vagrants of the Plains, with whom they associated on terms of fraternity. In nearly every Indian village were to be met renegade white men.

### Degraded Character of the Early Settlements

The establishment of stage lines, and later of the Pony Express, compelled the building of stations at certain distances apart in a line extending from the Missouri River to the mountains. These stations, usually mere shacks, sheltered the station-keeper, the drivers or express riders, a few hostlers, and men employed in various capacities by the company. The result was commonly the growth of a small settlement, generally with its low groggery, and a gambler or two to separate the boys from their hard-earned wages. Some of these stations on the Overland, notably that of Julesburg, where the Denver division began, grew into considerable importance, attracting a heterogeneous population of frontier characters, and composing a veritable hell. Drinking, carousing, and promiscuous shooting were the principal occupations both day and night, and very few women of respectability were to be found there.

That mere ability as bar-room fighters did not necessarily mean the possession of true courage was more than once proven in the history of Julesburg.



## THE GREAT PLAINS

On one occasion when the town was harassed by Indians, an old soldier managed to gather together a hundred of these desperate frontiersmen in an effort to drive back the marauding warriors. They started forth full of whiskey and bloodthirsty threats, and by some miracle were even brought within sight of the Indian encampment. But by that time they were out of both whiskey and courage. Their leader gave the word to charge, and spurred forward. Hearing no sound of hoofs behind, he glanced back, only to discover his gallant band scurrying away in every direction. There being no other course possible, the disgusted soldier turned and followed them.

. During the earlier years, previous to the Territorial act, not a few Missourians crossed the border and took squatter's possession of land in eastern Kansas, occasionally arriving in organized companies. Numerous churches of the east despatched missionaries to this far frontier, but their efforts were principally directed to the Indian tribes close to the Missouri. The Government established several garrisoned posts along that river, the most important being old Fort Kearney, on the present site of Nebraska City. Other posts, Forts Leavenworth, Scott, and Riley were erected farther out in what was yet known as the "Great American Desert," which was believed to be utterly useless from an agricultural standpoint.

# THE BEGINNING OF SETTLEMENT

## Discovery of Gold in Colorado

In 1858 the discovery of gold in the Rocky Mountains led to some slight settlement on the western edge of the Plains bordering the foot-hills. While the miners flocked to the gulches of the great range, some there were who found profitable occupation in the cultivation of supplies for the camps, along the valleys of the streams flowing eastward. These farmers were to be found at Pueblo on the Arkansas, along the banks of Cherry Creek, and on the present site of Colorado City. About this time the city of Denver was begun; one William McGaa building the first stockade, and William Larimer erecting the first house. This was a log cabin, 16 by 20 feet, having an earthen floor. It stood near the corner of what is now Larimer and Fifteenth Streets. There were in 1858 five women in Denver. In the Spring of 1859 a number of farmers began operations in the rich Arkansas bottoms. Corn was then worth from five to fifteen cents a pound, and a successful crop was as valuable as a gold mine. Uniting together, these farmers constructed an irrigating ditch from the Fontaine-qui-Bouille over their fields, and planted corn. When this had reached a good size, already waving temptingly in the wind and sun, a company of disgusted Missouri prospectors on their way back East, made camp near Fontaine City, and foraged their lean and hungry cattle on the green blades and juicy stalks. The farmers remonstrated, but the Missourians outnum-

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bered them, and only laughed. There followed a fight, in which some of the Missourians were killed, and several on both sides wounded. The victory, however, was with the farmers.

### Developing of Freighting in Colorado

This rapid populating of Colorado resulted in a continuous stream of freighting across the Plains, but, outside of these narrow lines of communication, it led to no settlement in all that wide expanse of level desolation. The freight trains of Russell and Majors dragged their winding length along the Arkansas, or Smoky Hill route day after day, bringing cargoes of goods, which were stored at their depots and sold to retail merchants. Thousands of wagons stretched also in continuous line along the valley of the Platte, mail facilities were introduced, and, as early as 1859, stage-coaches were running on regular schedules to Leavenworth. A branch of the Pony Express operated from Julesburg.

### Settlers Restrained by the Hostility of the Sioux

Farther north, in the Dakotas and Wyoming, few signs of permanent settlement were to be perceived so early. The continued and almost constant hostility of the various tribes of the Sioux nation, together with the unattractive appearance of the country, conspired to restrain settlers. The fact that no great highway traversed the Plains of Dakota also made its advantages less known. The fur-traders still held to their forts along the Mis-

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souri and tributary streams, and some prospecting had been undertaken in the Black Hills with indifferent success. The first permanent settlement was made at Sioux Falls in 1856, and a year later a few farmers came in along the valley of the Missouri. Travelled over by thousands on their journey to Oregon or California, Wyoming remained a primitive wilderness, its sole signs of settlement a few fur-trading posts. Nothing served to halt the multitude, and while a few may have idled along the way, there was no permanent population worthy of notice.

This, then, was the condition of the Great Plains when, in 1854, Kansas and Nebraska were made Territories, and legally thrown open to settlement. Across the broad expanse stretched well used trails, along which freighting wagons toiled westward to the mountains, or emigrant trains crawled on their long journey to the Pacific. The vast interior was yet scarcely known, touched here and there by solitary trappers, or scouted over by squads of hard-riding troopers, it yet remained an unexplored wilderness, the domain of wild animals and wild men. A slight fringe of early white settlements began to show along the eastern river courses; a little later adventurous miners swarmed through the gulches of the Rockies, but all between stretched the lonely desolation which the geographers yet called the "Great American Desert."

## CHAPTER II

### THE STRUGGLE IN EASTERN KANSAS

#### Pro-Slavery Men from Missouri Settle in Kansas

WITH the opening of the Kansas-Nebraska country to settlement came border war. The question whether slavery should be admitted or abolished within the limits of these newly created Territories being left to a vote of the citizens, the advocates of North and South began at once to prepare for the inevitable struggle. The close proximity of Missouri, a slave-holding State, gave to that party in the controversy a decided advantage. They were nearest to the field of action. Even before the country had been formally opened, thousands had crossed the line and taken up squatter residence in the rich bottom lands of the prairie. Others immediately followed, and by June, 1854, these transplanted Missourians were already meeting in convention to adopt resolutions looking to the forming of Kansas into a slave State.

But their opponents were not idle. All through the Northeastern States the feeling against a further spreading of slavery was intense. Emigrant Aid Associations were organized, and large numbers of emigrants were sent forth under their auspices, to settle in Kansas, for the express purpose of keeping that Territory free. Then men went westward with rifles and ammunition, expecting to fight,

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but believing firmly in the justice of their cause. They went as settlers, taking with them their wives and children, yet animated by the feeling that they were soldiers volunteering in a righteous cause. Their wagons were piled high with household goods, and driven by stern-faced men, who came to fight the battle of freedom. It was the beginning of the end—the first clash in a great war between right and wrong, destined to terminate years later at Appomattox.

### The Founding of Leavenworth, Atchison, and Lawrence

The first attempt at founding a town was made at Leavenworth, about the middle of June, 1854. Of the thirty-two persons interested some were pro-slavery, and some were free-State men, and the political character of the place has ever since been greatly mixed. In July, Atchison was laid out, and for several years was violently pro-slavery, and the centre of operations for all dwellers in the Territory holding those sentiments. The same month anti-slavery men established a settlement on Back Bone Ridge, which later became Lawrence. It was born under difficulty, the first meeting being dispersed by an invasion of border ruffians, as the Missouri invaders were called. But the first company of free-Staters, thirty in number, was soon reinforced by sixty or seventy more. The infant city constantly grew, being known at different times as Waukarusa, New Boston, and to the Missourians as Yankee Town, until the name of Lawrence was

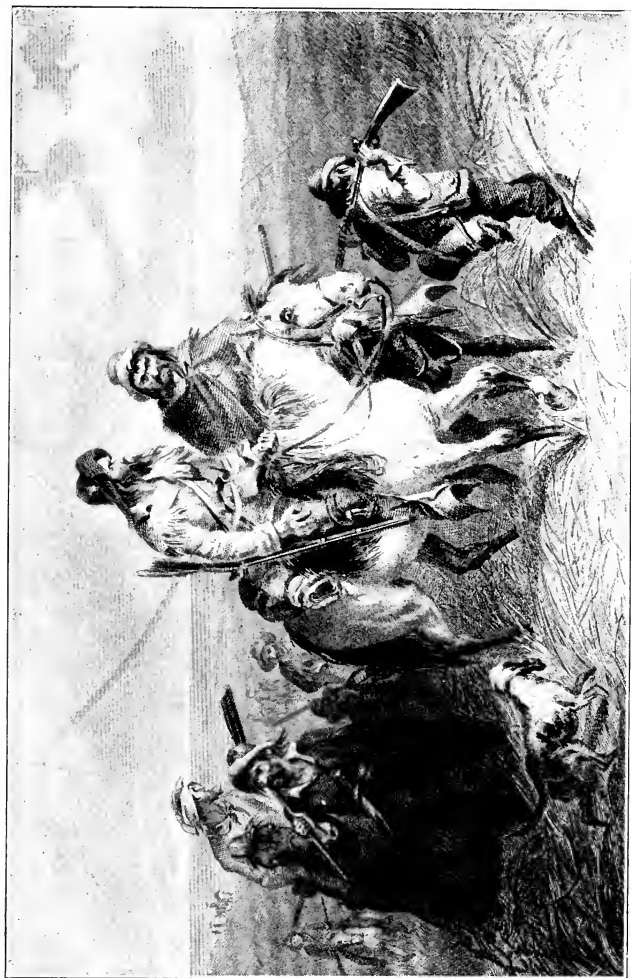
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finally adopted. The earlier colonists dwelt in tents, but as winter approached they built rude houses, either log or pole or thatch.

The tide of emigration from the free States constantly increased, being continually instigated by agitation. They spread back over the prairies for considerable distances, making homes in choice neighborhoods. They were there to stay. While some of the Missourians became permanent residents, the majority came into the country merely to create trouble, passing back and forth across the line, making little effort at permanent settlement. Topeka was started by a small party in December, but did not exceed twenty-five inhabitants during the year. The fourth company from New England chose the present site of Manhattan. Grasshopper Falls was also an early settlement of free-State men.

### Societies Organized to make Kansas a Slave State

By the Autumn of 1854 all eastern Kansas was practically in a state of guerilla war. Throughout the Missouri border counties secret societies were organized with the avowed object of extending slavery into Kansas. The members wore a bit of ribbon in the buttonhole to make them known to their fellows, and used passwords. These various organizations operated under different names,—Blue Lodge, Social Band, Friends' Society, Sons of the South,—but were all closely affiliated for the one purpose. Their general plan was to run out all free-State men from the country; to keep an armed force always



MISSOURIANS GOING TO KANSAS TO "VOTE"



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ready for invasion, and to furnish enough voters at every Kansas election to overcome the actual settlers. But, in spite of all such efforts, the free-State emigration into Kansas constantly increased, and the men coming were of the kind to fight fiercely for their rights either with ballots or rifles.

The struggle opened with the cowardly seizure of several settlers, including Thos. A. Minnard and the Rev. Frederick Starr, by bands of border ruffians, on the sole charge that they were abolitionists. Some of these were openly whipped, and others driven forcibly out of the country. With threats, and a display of armed force, the first settlers at Lawrence were ordered not to stop there, but the free-State men retaliated, and the Missourians retired without firing a shot. For a time the contest for supremacy shifted to the polls, and, with the approach of election day, hordes of Missourians overran the country, intimidating the widely scattered free-State settlers, and in many places actually driving their opponents from the polls, themselves voting as often as was deemed necessary. In this way the pro-slavery cause won what was then held to be a great victory, the whole border ringing with acclamations, and with denunciation of the defeated abolitionists.

Success at the polls gave to the pro-slavery party new courage and confidence. This led almost immediately to acts of violence. The first of these mob outrages occurred in Parkville, where a free-State printing press was seized and thrown into the

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Missouri River. Several of the Missouri secret societies adopted resolutions against allowing any ministers from the free States to preach in Kansas, and threatening dire results if they dared persist. Prominent free-State men were ordered to leave the country, and when they refused to be intimidated they were visited by a mob and treated brutally. Throughout all the eastern counties of Kansas the people lived over a volcano which might burst forth at any moment.

Holloway, in his "History of Kansas," thus pictures the two different elements in the community:

"The pro-slavery men, impetuous, aggressive, and overbearing sought by all possible means to embroil the opposite party into difficulties. The free-State men, cool, prudent, and sagacious, as harmless as doves and as wise as serpents, acted entirely upon the defensive, and avoided, as much as possible, all troubles. The former were blustering and mercenary, the latter quiet and unobtrusive. The former claimed as their right the very thing which had been referred to the decision of the ballot-box; the latter only claimed the right which their Government guaranteed them, of assisting to give shape to that decision. The one was wild with excitement, blinded by prejudice, rough and profane, supported by the adjoining State, strong in numbers and wealth; the other quiet, intelligent, refined, and devotional, were far removed from friends, liable to be crushed at any moment by the furious and threatening ruffians of the border. The press of one sent forth slang, vituperation, misrepresentation, and inflammatory appeals, fit fuel for civil war; that of the other denounced all acts of violence, and appealed to men's better natures to abstain from engendering strife."

### Triumph of the Pro-Slavery Men

Finally, through the forced resignation of Governor Reeder, and the carrying of elections by the

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importation of illegal voters from Missouri, the pro-slavery advocates obtained complete control of the Territorial Government. Not a single free-State man was left in the Legislature, which proceeded to enact laws most repulsive and obnoxious to the vast majority of the real settlers. Arrogant and domineering, the victors, through fraud and intimidation and violence, proceeded to add insult to injury. "Never in the history of the world" says a writers of those times, "even in days when might made right, were there such barefaced and audacious acts of civil oppression inflicted upon a community." The Legislature was all-powerful; it appointed State and county officers, levied taxes, and gagged the free men and the free press.

### Revolt of the Anti-Slavery Men

In this emergency the free-State men seem to have acted with deliberation and dignity. They held a number of mass meetings, in which some violent speeches were made, although the general spirit appeared conciliatory. The second Governor of the Territory, Wilson Shannon, of Ohio, finding upon arrival that all legislative power was already in the hands of the pro-slavery party, and being himself a Democrat of the old school, very naturally came under the influence of the Missourians. The acknowledged leader of this side during the greater part of these border difficulties was a man of real strength and conviction, David R. Atchison, formerly United States Senator from Missouri. In

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political manipulation, the handling of men, the inflaming of passion, and the daring intimidation of opponents, he was a past master.

Finding the ordinary road to reform blocked by fraud and violence, the ballot boxes and all law-making power in the hands of their enemies, the free-State settlers resorted to the expedient of openly ignoring all acts of legislation passed by the pro-slavery House of Representatives. They utterly discarded all courts, justices, probate judges, and registers. Meeting at Topeka they drew up an amateur Constitution, and began to live independently under its provisions.

This open revolt must, of necessity, lead to an early clash between the partisans. Hatred grew, and particularly were the passions of pro-slavery men directed toward that offensive hotbed of abolitionism, the town of Lawrence. The story of the bloodshed, the skirmishes, the battles, and the midnight assassinations in those months which followed cannot be related here in detail. From the historical standpoint many of these scenes of violence and hatred have little value, even though logically connected with the solution of a great question to be finally decided by the mightiest war of modern times. Here was the preliminary struggle fought out amid the loneliness of the Kansas prairies, while personal hatred and party animosity oftentimes hid the real issue, and turned war into assassination, and changed battle to massacre. Neither side can be absolved of wrong; the spirit of mercy seldom

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hovered over the contending camps of pro-slavery and free-soil advocates; it was a contest of guerillas, merciless, revengeful, fought out in the brush by the light of burning homes, and amid the agony of the innocent. On whichever side our sympathies may be, in horror we must turn away ashamed of the atrocities wrought by the rifle and the torch under the cloak of virtue. Scarcely a foot of eastern Kansas but was soaked with blood, and the names of obscure fields of strife are legion.

### John Brown's Voice is for War

The resort to arms may be said to have begun in a claim dispute at Hickory Ridge, ten miles south of Lawrence, November 21, 1855, where a pro-slavery squatter named Coleman assassinated a young free-soiler, Charles M. Dow. As a result of this affair the entire country seemed to gather into hostile camps. There were several skirmishes, and finally the pro-slavery men besieged Lawrence, within which some six hundred free-soilers had entrenched themselves. Finally, through the efforts of Governor Shannon, the invading horde of Missourians, who composed the major part of the pro-slavery forces, were induced to withdraw. By the majority of the free-State party this was hailed as a notable victory, but among their orators there was one who protested vigorously. Spring writes:

"A single voice was raised in solemn and public protest against the peace. After the treaty and its stipulations had become known; after speeches of felicitation on the happy sub-

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sidence of perils that threatened to engulf the settlement in ruin had been made, an unknown man — tall, slender, angular; his face clean shaven, sombre, strongly lined, of Puritan tone and configuration; his blue-gray eyes honest, inexorable; strange, unworldly intensities enveloping him like an atmosphere — mounted a dry-goods box, and began to denounce the treaty as an attempt to gain by foolish, uncomprehending makeshift what could be compassed only by the shedding of blood. Since that day the name of this unknown man, plucked down from the dry-goods box with his speech mostly unspoken, has filled the post-horns of the world — old John Brown."

The Winter of 1855-56 was a most severe one, and the consequence was a temporary peace between the warring factions. But rumors of an expected invasion by the Missourians in the spring were scattered broadcast, and they intensified the prevailing bitterness. A sheriff named Jones, who had been a moving spirit in the last affair, started the spring outbreak, by an endeavor to arrest several leading free-soilers at Lawrence. Jones was promptly shot, but not killed, and once again Lawrence became the centre of turmoil, the town being attacked by a mob of avenging pro-slavery men, thoroughly sacked, and many of the prominent citizens arrested and driven out of the country. Atchison, who was in command, urged moderation, and his counsel prevented bloodshed, although the destruction of property was great.

### Brown takes a Mean Revenge

The burning and sacking of Lawrence instantly aroused in the scattered free-State men a fierce de-



BORDER RUFFIANS "GOING OVER TO WIPE OUT LAWRENCE"





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sire for retaliation. Everywhere they rallied under arms. The first act of revenge was utterly without justification; it remains a blot on the free-State cause and on the name of old John Brown, who was concerned in it. This was a foray from the free-soil settlement of Ossawatimie to a place known as Dutch Henry's Crossing, where a company of pro-slavery raiders had been in camp. Only seven or eight men, besides Brown, were in the expedition. The raiders having already departed, these men decided to put out of the way certain pro-slavery squatters in the neighborhood. It was cowardly night work, but when day dawned, the assassins rode back to Ossawatimie, leaving behind them, hacked and slashed with cutlasses, the corpses of five men. No justification for this act, worthy of consideration, has ever been advanced even by Brown's most ardent admirers, while his own statements were so evasive as to deceive his most intimate friends. Yet there may have been a reason satisfying his conscience which the world will never know. The result was a fresh invasion of Missourians, and a concentration of pro-slavery forces in the neighborhood of Ossawatimie, which led to armed fighting. Palmyra and Prairie City were raided by a band in camp at Black Jack, but this body was fiercely attacked by a party of free-soilers under Brown, and the leader, Pate, and most of his followers were captured. A pro-slavery trader at St. Bernard was also made prisoner, and his stock of goods confiscated.

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### Guerilla Warfare

Parties favoring both sides now took the field, and guerrilla fighting swept the full length of the border, United States troops endeavoring vainly to interfere between the belligerents. The pro-slavery men were forced sullenly back, and for a time devoted all their energies in an effort to stop further immigration from the free States. Finding their efforts at obstruction useless, the thoroughly madened Missourians once again took up their rifles for the invasion of Kansas. But in the meantime new settlers had been pouring in, animated by the principle of free-soil, and ready to defend it with their lives. Yet Missouri was the natural gateway to the country, and the bitterness along the border resulted in a considerable cutting off of supplies, so that many of the free-State towns were practically blockaded. Robbery and pilfering were daily occurrences, and murder was not infrequent. Tecumseh and Lawrence were the greatest sufferers. Franklin was the scene of a fierce battle; and the free-State men, being victorious, pushed on toward Lecompton, where they had a hot skirmish and captured Fort Titus. For the time being the fortunes of war seemed with the free-State party, but the pendulum swung about evenly; attack and defence, advance and retreat, became the regular order, each adventure costing new lives and adding to the bitterness between factions.

As though in actual war, there was an exchange of prisoners, Governor Shannon conducting nego-

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tiations on one side, and a committee from the Topeka convention on the other. The added controversy growing out of this act resulted in Shannon's resignation. In after years he thus forcefully summed up the situation: "Govern the Kansas of 1855 and '56? You might as well have attempted to govern the devil in hell." For it was now the pro-slavery turn of the wheel, and Ossawatimie the point of attack. Here old John Brown was driven out, but not without a fight, in which six free-State men were killed, including two of his own sons, and the buildings burned to the ground. In retaliation the free-soilers rallied and invested Lecompton, but were dispersed without battle.

### Governor Geary Attempts to End the War

John W. Geary, of Pennsylvania, became the new Governor. In the words of Spring, he—

"stepped into the border tumult with the assertive bearing of a Titan. Superb, and not wholly misplaced, was his self-confidence. That he did not idealize the situation is clear, as he took pains to say that it could not be worse. Not only did he fully anticipate success, but the very desperation of affairs fascinated him. After ten weeks in the Territory he wrote, 'I am perfectly enthusiastic in my mission.'"

And it is fair to say that he started well; but he was dealing with antagonistic elements which probably no man could have controlled without almost unlimited military power. Anarchy, revolt, and chaos were everywhere; every man carried arms, neighbors distrusted each other, and many bands roamed

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the country with no higher purpose than plunder. Missourians in armed bodies kept pouring across the border, and neither inaugurals, proclamations, nor military orders were able to halt them. There was fierce fighting all along the line, but generally centring in and about Lawrence; and every raid by pro-slavery men found its echo in some outrage perpetrated by the advocates of free-soil. It becomes wearisome to attempt even to name the multitude of skirmishes, the midnight assassinations, the repeated advances and retreats, of the scattered bodies of partisans. After six months of desperate effort to stem the tide Geary fled in defeat to Washington.

### **The Contestants Becoming Tired, Order is Established**

His successor was Robert J. Walker, also a Pennsylvanian, an experienced, smooth-tongued politician. Convention followed convention, with plenty of rifle practice between, and finally an election in which the free-State party were victorious. In the turmoil which followed, Walker fled the country, and General John W. Denver, a Virginian, was sent forth as the next victim. Politics continued hot, but the contestants being somewhat tired out by continuous war, the operations in the field had by this time degenerated into "jay-hawking,"—a local term for the shooting of neighbors who belonged to the other side of the controversy. This custom died out slowly, but by the Summer of 1859 it became less frequent, and a crude, rudimental order was established throughout the Territory. During the period

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of the Civil War the border towns suffered severely, Lawrence, as usual, being the special object of attack.

### Summary of the Struggle

Spring ably sums up the entire period of disorder in these satisfactory words:

“The struggle for the possession of Kansas, the loss of which to the South made secession a certainty, was essentially political and constitutional — not military. The few skirmishes that took place have a secondary if not tertiary importance. In the field of diplomacy and finesse the pro-slavery leaders were outgeneralled. Reckoning too confidently and disdainfully on numbers, on nearness to the theatre of operations and federal support, they also blundered in adopting consequently a policy of noise and bluff. They came thundering into the Territory on the thirtieth of March, 1855, when quieter measures would have served their purposes far better. In the sack of Lawrence, and the dispersion of the Topeka Legislature, victories were won which returned to plague the victors. The career of the free-State party under the lead of Governor Robinson, who projected and inspired the whole tactical plan of its operations, has no parallel in American history. Composed of heterogeneous, clashing, feverish elements; repudiating the Territorial Legislature, and subsisting without legislation — an intermediate condition of virtual outlawry — from the settlement of Lawrence until 1858, the party was not only successfully held together during this chaotic period, but, by a series of extraordinary expedients, by adroitly turning pro-slavery mistakes to account, and by rousing Northern sympathy through successful advertisement of its calamities, rescued Kansas from the clutch of Missouri, and then disbanded.”

### CHAPTER III

## DAYS OF THE CATTLE KINGS

#### Dawn of the American Cattle Trade

**T**HESE days, whose true beginnings cannot be stated with positiveness, extend somewhat beyond the date with which the record of this volume is supposed to conclude, yet, being an important part of the story of the Great Plains, the review of them cannot well be avoided. No more picturesque state of life in the open — strenuous, perilous, heroic — has ever been penned. The cowboy of the Plains was a unique figure, to whom full justice has never yet been accorded. To the many he remains a riotous character, whose principal occupation was the shooting up of border towns. Yet this was a mere incident in a hard, laborious life, lived almost continuously in the saddle, on remote ranges or upon the Long Trail. His was emphatically the spirit of the West, the boundless sweep of prairie his natural environment, the saddle his home.

Far away in point of time, the wild-cattle industry of America had its birth in far-off Mexico. Rapidly the herds increased, those hordes of long-horned, wild cattle, ever seeking a wider range to the northward, following close to the retreating buffalo, and herded by reckless Mexican cowboys, swarthy of face and picturesque in costume. Thus in time the advance guard of this vast army of cattle

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drifted across the Rio Grande, and out upon the Texas Plains. Soon it was discovered that the short gray grass of northern Texas, upon which the roaming buffalo had thrived so long, would rear cattle to a much greater size than the herbage along the coast. A cow weighing five or six hundred pounds in the low country, would increase one-third on this higher range. And there the cowboys drove the herds, sometimes with Indian consent, sometimes holding their range with rifles.

### The Mexican Cowboy Succeeded by the American

It was here a change began, not only in the nature of the cattle, but also in the personnel of those men who herded them. One by one the swarthy-faced Mexican riders dropped aside, and adventurous young Americans leaped into the vacated saddles and rode the trails. They were not bad men, as the border reckoned, although out of their ranks came desperado and outlaw, but the majority were young, adventurous, the stuff of whom good soldiers are made, ever welcoming danger, defying privation, resolutely overcoming difficulty, and insistent upon their rights. This was practically the dawn of the American cattle trade. The Long Trail began pushing its sinuous length northward, as the owners of the fast-increasing herds sought more profitable markets. At first the drive was back into old Mexico; but the way was long, the prices were low. Then it turned northward, and remained there to the end. As early as 1857 Texas cattle



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were driven to Illinois; in 1862, to various points on the Mississippi River. In 1867 a drover started with his bunch for California, only to be halted by hostile Indians; but two years later herds were driven from Texas to Nevada.

### Texas Cattle on the Long Trail

But these were mere side trails. The one of real importance aimed for the markets of the North. The close of the Civil War found the Texas Plains fairly covered with millions of wild cattle having no actual or determinate value. Unless an outlet could be found they would remain utterly worthless. But railroads were by that time pushing out across the Plains of Kansas. With every mile of advance the steel rails brought nearer the markets of the world. Instinctively the Texas cattlemen moved forward to meet them. The vast array of tossing broad-horns were headed northward, and the cowboys rode behind urging them on in solid phalanx. It was a wondrous sight, this ever increasing stream of cattle sweeping out of the dim Plains, over hundreds of miles of grim desolation to the markets of the North. Across the Canadian, the Cimarron, and the Red River, over the Plains of Texas, the diversified lands of the Indian nations, the rolling prairies of Kansas, the slowly advancing droves found passage, the trail ever cutting deeper into the soil. In the year 1866 alone, it was pounded down by the hoofs of more than a quarter-million

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cattle. Five years later over six hundred thousand long-horns crossed the Red River north-bound.

### The Rise of Mushroom Towns on the Trail

What days those were along the border, when money was plentiful, and human life the mere sport of a moment! Town after town, becoming in turn the terminus of the Long Trail, rose into sudden prominence, only to sink again into as sudden oblivion as the iron rails advanced. Abilene, Newton, Wichita, Ellsworth, Hays City, Great Bend, Dodge City all had their day, their feverish activity, their flaming up into good and evil repute. Within the limits of each in turn vice held high carnival. Here it was that, weary with the Long Trail and the months of solitude passed on lonely ranges, the reckless nature of the cowboy found invitation to excess. Here, at the end of his journey, weary with labor and peril, like the sailor ashore after a long voyage, the herder squandered his hard-earned wages, and sank his real manhood in riotous dissipation and passionate indulgence. Here he became the desperado, the "gun-fighter," and the "bad man." He was encouraged to no higher life. Gambling-houses and brothels filled the streets from end to end; the saloon welcomed him as he swung down from the saddle; the very air was electric with the pleasures of sin. When under the influence of vile liquor and riotous associates, the mild-mannered, generous, manly fellow, who rode

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so confidently the vast wilderness of the Plains, became a terror, whose only recognized law was the "45" dangling at the hip.

### Cattle-Raising on the Northern Plains

Gradually the nature of the Long Trail changed. The more northern Plains also began to raise cattle, but of a different breed, and prejudice grew against the longhorns. There came a scourge of fever among the Texas cattle, and settlers of Kansas rose in revolt against the contagion being spread among their own herds. With rifles they barred the Trail, and grimly turned back the thousands pressing north. There were fights along the border, in which both sides had to take account of their dead. By 1868 the more northern Plains, between the Missouri and the Rockies, had been sufficiently cleared of their wild inhabitants to admit of slight settlement. Cattlemen were prompt to take advantage of these broad pastures. The buffalo grass and the pure water of the streams were conducive to the rapid growth of stock. True, the loss through the severity of winter storms proved very large, yet the increase remained sufficient to yield satisfactory profit. The range was yearly extended northward, the vast herds gradually forcing back the inferior cattle of Texas. The Long Trail swung slowly westward with these changes governing the market. The old time famous—or infamous—cattle towns sank into commonplace villages, and the daring range-riders drove their herds of long-horns

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through every open park, mesa, and valley of Colorado, and across the high plateaus of Wyoming into distant Montana. Somewhere on the way they became merged into the northern droves, losing their old wild identity, their progeny floating southward again to market, minus the longhorns, the typical cattle of the later trade.

### Strenuous Life of the Cowboy

For many a long year the western portion of the Great Plains was held utterly unfit for agriculture. It remained in its primitive barrenness, almost untouched by settlement. To the teeming thousands of the East it was still looked upon as a vast forbidding desert. Across it stretched those narrow trails where travellers passed on their journey westward, anxious only to reach its end. The plodding freight-wagon, the lumbering stage-coach, the flying express passed this way, yet saw nothing but the endless wilderness. But here was the cattle country, extending finally from the Rio Grande to the North Dakota line, roamed over by vast herds, and guarded night and day by an army of cowboys. By magic the cattle industry had spread over all this neglected region; and jealous of its rights, it fought back for many a year all attempts at permanent settlement within its chosen domain. The wide, untrammelled range belonged to the cattlemen by right of possession, and they held it with the rifle as long as possible. Hough writes:

"It was a curious, colossal, tremendous movement, this  
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migration of the cowmen and their herds, undoubtedly the greatest pastoral movement in the history of the world. It came with a rush and a surge, and in ten years it had subsided. That decade was an epoch in the West. The cities of Cibola began. The strong men of the Plains met and clashed, and warred and united and pushed on. What a decade that was! What must have been the men who made it what it was! It was an iron country, and upon it came men of iron. Dauntless, indomitable, each time they took a herd North they saw enough of life to fill in vivid pages far more than a single book. They met the ruffians and robbers of the Missouri border, and overcame them. They met the Indians who sought to extort toll from them, and fought and beat them. Worse than all these, they met the desert and the flood, and overcame them also. Worse yet than those, they met the repelling forces of an entire climatic change, the silent enemies of other latitudes. These, too, they overcame. The kings of the range divided the kingdom of free grass."

### The Cowboy's Daily Work

Life in the great cattle country was a life of variety, yet of sameness. Hardship, loneliness, peril were the cowboy's constant companions. No weakling long survived, no coward ever endured. The far north and far south ranges presented different problems for solution, different dangers to be met, yet over all was a sameness except as to detail. In some places the struggle was against drought, against the pitiless desert, the arid heat of sun-baked desolation; in others the battle was as sternly waged against the deadening sleet, the down-sweep of the storm across the bare Plains. In either case it required men to ride the lines and hold the cattle. There are those among us even in this day who look back and dream; we see again the wide sweep of

## DAYS OF THE CATTLE KINGS

plain and sky; we feel the sense of freedom which that broad expanse brings, the mastery of the wilds.

This sense of freedom and mastery constituted the exhilaration which drew and held thousands to the dull routine work of the range. About the home ranch the days and nights passed under a discipline no less severe because it was only half acknowledged. The foreman ruled; the cowboy grumbled but obeyed, even unto death. He was a good soldier, or the camp would have none of him. From earliest gray of dawn until the flickering twilight, work never ceased. There were no vacations, no furloughs from this service of the range. Except for those brief, infrequent periods passed amid the garish glitter of some frontier hell at the end of the drive to market, the demands of duty seldom ceased. Never did men work harder, through longer hours, or amid more peril and discomforts, for so small a wage, as these tireless guardians of the herds. Yet they loved it, and the marvellous joy of the life crept into the blood. It was the call of the wild. Night and day, in sunshine and in storm, they rode the uplands and the valleys; they slept in the saddle, or on the open Plains under the stars of the Great Desert; they conquered the wild horses of the prairies into obedience to quirt and spur; they dashed forward into a *mêlée* of frightened cattle, while the thunder roared and the lightning flashed, with death on every hand. They were the minute men, never knowing when the call for sacrifice might come, yet never failing to answer when it did. Under his

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picturesque garb, every article a necessity of his calling,—the hairy “chaps,” the broad sombrero, the clanking spurs, the glistening “slicker,”—beat the undaunted heart of a man loyal to his employer, faithful to his duty, and a Westerner from head to foot.

### **His Character as Affected by his Environment**

Except for the round-ups in spring and fall, and the drive to market, the social life of the cowboy was confined to the companionship offered by the home ranch, or an occasional meeting on the wide range. Month after month he was alone, or with the single comrade who rode the lines with him. Inevitably he grew silent, chary of speech, but quick and effective in action. Scarcely knowing why, or how, the environment marked him, as the sea the sailor. He became a part of those Great Plains he ruled and loved. Always he was at war—the war of man with brute, of man with the elements; he must conquer or go down. Riding about the sleeping herd at night, singing lustily to calm their fears; loping in seeming carelessness beside the advancing column, amid the dust of thousands of hoofs; sweeping across the sun-browned ridges, a mere speck in the vast landscape; spurring desperately with his fellows to bring in the last stray for the branding; or rolled in his blanket under the stars, the cowboy must be always ready, resourceful, prepared for any emergency. Nothing must count but duty; human life was a bagatelle in those days on

## DAYS OF THE CATTLE KINGS

the Plains: in the mad stampede of the blackest night; in the crazy drifting before a northern blizzard, in the fierce down-rush of water through the canyons, with every impetus of quirt and spur the daring rider must head the rush of terrified animals, or lie himself a shapeless pulp under their pounding hoofs. There is no choice then! "Ride, Jim! Ride, Springtime! and Tex., and Curley, and Kid, and Cherokee, and all the rest of you! Now, if ever, you must be men of proof! Into the rattle of it, up to the head of it, press, spur, crowd! Shoot into their faces, frighten them back, turn them aside, ride into them, over them, but ride fast and thoughtless of yourself! There is no possibility of taking care. The pony must do it all. The pony knows what a stumble means. The herd will roll over horse and man, and crush them as if they were but prairie flowers. The ground is rough, but there must be no blunder. Ah, but there was! Something happened there! There was a stumble! There was a cry, smothered; but all that was half a mile back. The herd sweeps on."

### His Battles with Savages and Others

And those range days are full of other stories. It was not cattle and storms alone the cowboy contended against. He was soldier and scout, as well as herder. Again and again, sometimes singly, sometimes in company, he met the savage in contest of blood. Comanche, Apache, Kiowa, Arapahoe, Cheyenne, and Sioux, all had a try at the nerve of



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those lone white riders, and they paid the cost. And there was war everywhere. Many a cattle-king held his kingdom of free grass and free water by grace of the rifle and the reckless daring of his men. There were battles—unknown, unnamed—fought out fiercely in the nooks and corners of the cow-country—struggles against rivals, against “rustlers,” against “nesters,” against sheep-men, against the gradual advance of civilization and settlement. And the cowboy was loyal to the “old man”—his life as freely offered here, in some quarrel regarding the merits of which he knew nothing, as when he rode recklessly to round up a stampeding herd.

### The Last of the Cowboy

But the end came—came with the steady advance of iron rails across the open Plain, and the consequent influx of emigrants. In spite of their struggles the cattlemen were driven back, their vast ranges transformed into farms, their free grass checkered by wire fences. It was inevitable. The Western farmer, though often discouraged and beaten, came to stay, and he stayed. The railroads crossed the continent in many a line, ever narrowing the cow-country. They began to build spurs and side-lines; they bent north and south; they wiped out forever free grass and free water. The occupation of the cowboy was gone; the herds vanished, the wide sweep of the Plains became only a memory. The centre of what was left of the cattle industry shifted to more remote regions, to Wyoming and Montana

## DAYS OF THE CATTLE KINGS

in the North, to New Mexico and Arizona in the South. With the change in environment much that had served to make the cowboy unique and picturesque disappeared. Yet to the end he remained a typical figure of the West, while the routine of his duties only slightly varied. He who has best written his story, Emerson Hough, thus sums up its closing chapter:

“The cowboy was simply a part of the Great West. Never was any character more misunderstood than he; and so thorough was his misrepresentation that part of the public even to-day will have no other way of looking at him. They see the wide hat, and not the honest face beneath it. They remember the wild, momentary freaks of the man, but forget his lifetime of hard work and patient faithfulness. The way in which we should look at the cowboy of the passing West is not as a curiosity, but as a product; not as an eccentric driver of horned cattle, but as a man suited to his times. . . . He was a part of the warp of an interwoven web of humanity, still leaving a dash of color upon the growing monotone.”

## CHAPTER IV

### BUILDING THE FIRST RAILROAD

#### Resistance of Indians to the Advance of Civilization

**T**HE building of the Union Pacific marked the commencement of a new epoch on the Great Plains. Over a large extent of hitherto desolate country it was the harbinger of advancing civilization and settlement. To none was this more quickly apparent than to the aboriginal inhabitants of that vast waste. Whether or not the Indian mind fully comprehended the significance of those parallel iron rails pressing relentlessly forward up the Platte Valley, this advance of the white man to supremacy was instantly met with fierce and prolonged resistance. Never before, or since, in the history of the Plains tribes, was there so close an alliance for war against a common enemy. Every wild tribe, nation, and band were in the field, and from end to end of the border sounded the war-cry, and arose the flames of destruction. This began with the earliest efforts at surveying a route, and continued until after the driving of the last spike. Surveyors, graders, trackmen, even trainmen, fought desperately for every mile they attained westward. The end of the track was almost inevitably a battle ground. The workmen labored, with their guns

## BUILDING THE FIRST RAILROAD

within easy reach, and under the vigilant guard of detachments of troops. Night and day peril lurked on every side, and savage spying eyes watched for opportunity over adjacent ridges. The strain, the imminent danger, was incessant, the skulking foe ever close at hand.

### Surveys for a Pacific Railroad

The possibility of building a rail communication across the continent had been a dream of certain army officers and venturesome civilians, for many years. As early as 1849 Lieutenant Warner made certain surveys in the farther West of the mountains, which may be held as preliminary to this great project. From the terminus on the Missouri exploring surveys, with this purpose clearly in mind, began as early as 1853, and continued each year until 1861, when the coming on of the Civil War put a temporary stop to contemplated plans. These surveys were conducted by General G. M. Dodge, and in picturing them I shall largely quote his own language. He says:

“The first private survey and exploration of the Pacific Railroad was caused by the failure of the Mississippi and Missouri — now the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific — to complete its project. The men who put their money into that enterprise conceived the idea of working up a scheme, west of Iowa, that would be an inducement to capital to invest in carrying their project across Iowa to the Missouri River. They also wished to determine at what point on the Missouri the Pacific Railroad would start, so as to terminate their road at that point. The explorers adopted Council Bluffs, Iowa, as that point.”

## THE GREAT PLAINS

### Lincoln's Share in Founding the Union Pacific

The Union Pacific Company was finally organized at Chicago, September 2, 1862, but the war then being on in earnest, the effort to engage capital in the project proved a failure. Little was immediately accomplished, except some further preliminary surveys carried on by Reed, Dey, and Brayton. But previous to this an accidental meeting between General Dodge and Abraham Lincoln had occurred, by which Mr. Lincoln's interest had been aroused regarding the projected movement. This resulted later in governmental assistance toward the furthering of the scheme. Dodge writes of this early conference:

"During these explorations, in 1856 or 1857, I happened to return to Council Bluffs, where Mr. Lincoln chanced to be on business. It was then quite an event for an exploring party to reach the States. After dinner, while I was sitting on the stoop of the Pacific House, Mr. Lincoln came and sat down beside me and, in his kindly way and manner, was soon drawing from me all I knew of the country west, and the result of my surveys. The secrets that were to go to my employers he got, and, in fact, as the saying there was, he completely 'shelled my woods.'"

As a direct result of that interview, in the Spring of 1863 President Lincoln sent for Dodge, then with Grant's army at Corinth, to come to him for further conference at Washington.

Under the action of a law passed by Congress in 1862, it had become the duty of the President to fix the eastern terminus of the projected Pacific Railroad. Lincoln was deeply interested in the whole matter, and very desirous of having the ad-

## BUILDING THE FIRST RAILROAD

vance made promptly. Council Bluffs was selected for the eastern terminus, but the strain on the Government at that time made it necessary to rely upon private enterprise for the furnishing of means to its building. Nothing further of importance was accomplished until, in 1864, Congress enacted further legislation; but after the close of the war exploration of the territory involved was renewed with vigor, and several satisfactory routes for crossing the mountains were discovered and surveyed. These various exploring parties were under Government control, largely being commanded by officers of the army; but the route adopted by the Union Pacific was laid out mainly through private enterprise. Commercially, although not from an engineering viewpoint, it constituted a true line from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

### **It and the Central Pacific Built for Commercial Purposes**

But the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific (the latter the section west of Ogden, built under separate organization of capital, yet in unison) were projected for commercial purposes, and with the one object—to obtain a quick, short line from river to coast. With the rather serious engineering obstacles encountered, particularly in the mountainous regions, we are not now especially concerned. That they were most formidable must be apparent to all travellers of these later days, but our particular interest now centres on the great country of the Plains where the work was comparatively easy, and

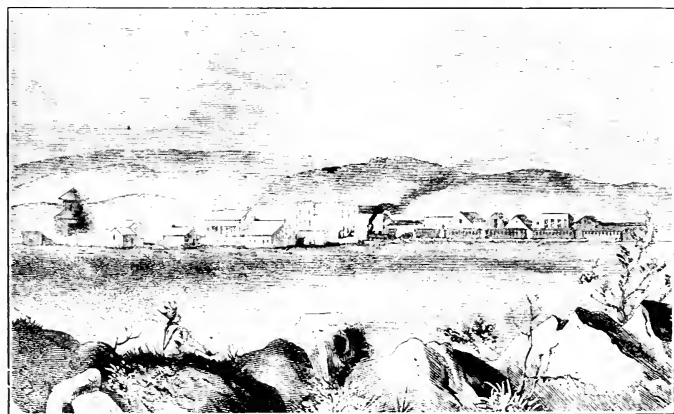
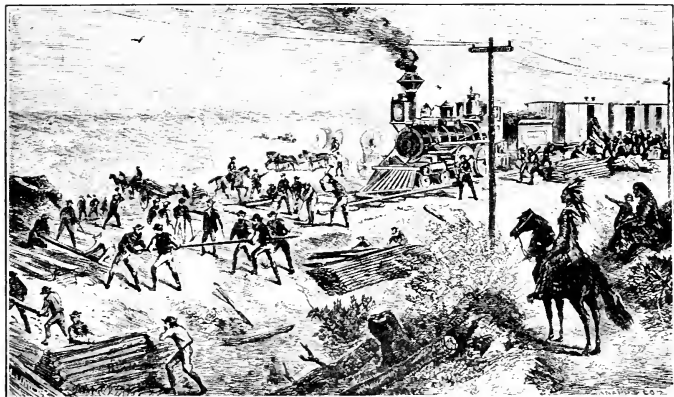
## THE GREAT PLAINS

the grades light. In 1863 and 1864 the final surveys were systematically begun, and by 1866 the entire selected route was being carefully considered. In Dodge's graphic language:

"Day and night, summer and winter, the explorations were pushed forward through dangers and hardships that very few at this day appreciate; as every mile had to be in range of the musket, there was not a moment's security. In making the surveys numbers of our men, some of them the ablest and most promising, were killed; and during the construction our stock was run off by the hundred, I might say by the thousand. As one difficulty after another arose and was overcome, both in the engineering and construction departments, a new era in railroad building was inaugurated."

### The Construction an Arduous Work

This simple statement is well within the limits of modesty. From every standpoint it was a marvellous enterprise, carried successfully forward with great skill and courage in midst of constant peril and almost insurmountable discouragements. In 1865 forty miles of track was laid; in 1866, two hundred and sixty; in 1867, two hundred and forty, including the ascent to the summit of the Rocky Mountains, at an elevation of over eight thousand feet; in 1868, and up to May 10, 1869, five hundred and fifty-five miles more was added, besides which over one hundred and eighty miles of temporary and side tracks was constructed. The marvel of it grows as the conditions are considered. This was through a new, unsettled country; over desert, plain, and rugged mountain, with hostile



### SCENES ALONG THE LINE OF THE FIRST RAILROAD

RAILROAD-BUILDING ACROSS THE PLAINS — AN ATTACK ON THE CONSTRUCTION GANG — TYPE OF THE TOWNS WHICH SPRANG UP ALONG THE NEW LINE





## BUILDING THE FIRST RAILROAD

Indians swarming over the route, and every laborer and every pound of equipment hauled hundreds of miles to the front.

The first grading was commenced in the Autumn of 1864, and the first rail placed in position in July the following year. At this time there was no rail communication between Council Bluffs and the East, while the country to be traversed could furnish little, if any, of the materials necessary. Timber, fuel, steel—everything required, including mules and men, had to be transported for hundreds, and oftentimes thousands of miles, by steamboats up the dangerous Missouri, and then in wagons along the prairie trails. It required a most efficient organization, an able corps of officers, an army of men, a multitude of mules. Probably the experiences derived from the great war just concluded alone made so stupendous an undertaking possible. The leaders of construction had been trained in the field to overcome natural obstacles, to meet emergencies in the quickest practicable manner. They were not theorists, but builders. Many of the employees were discharged volunteers, disciplined by three years in the ranks, habituated to danger and hardship. Back of this efficient field force stood the Government as sponsor; already burdened with billions of debt, fifty million dollars more was floated to help to finance this project which promised so much for the development of the West. This act created a credit which enabled the railroad management to float an equal amount with ease. Handled by men of means,

## THE GREAT PLAINS

courage, and unbounded faith,—men who threw their own private fortunes into the scale,—the gigantic task was begun and finished. The men at the front always knew they had behind them a reserve force that would never fail.

### Military Protection for the Workmen

In the actual field work the regular army became conspicuous. The commissary department was freely utilized. Troops in considerable numbers were detained to guard the various working parties; the pioneers explored, surveyed, located, and built inside picket lines, while scouting parties of cavalymen patrolled the more distant bluffs, or vigorously pursued Indian raiders. The workmen marched to their labor to the tap of the drum, every man armed for instant battle. They stacked their guns on the dump, as they stripped for the day's work. Writes Dodge:

“General Casement's track-train could arm a thousand men at a word; and from him, as a head, down to his chief spiker, it could be commanded by experienced officers of every rank from general to captain. They had served five years at the front, and over half of the men had shouldered a musket in many battles. An illustration of this came to me after our track had passed Plum Creek, two hundred miles west of the Missouri River. The Indians had captured a freight train, and were in possession of it and its crew. It so happened that I was coming down from the front with my car, which was a travelling arsenal. At Plum Creek station word came of this capture and stopped us. On my train were perhaps twenty men, some a portion of the crew, some who had been discharged and sought passage to the rear. Nearly all were strangers to me.

## BUILDING THE FIRST RAILROAD

The excitement of the capture, and the reports coming by telegraph of the burning train, brought all the men to the platform, and, when I called upon them to fall in, to go forward and retake the train, every man went into line, and by his position showed that he was a soldier. We ran down slowly until we came in sight of the train. I gave the order to deploy as skirmishers, and at the command they went forward as steadily, and in as good order, as we had seen the old soldiers climb the face of Kenesaw under fire."

### Effects of Increased Settlement on Soil and Climate

In those days the one thought of the promoters of this great transcontinental line was the through traffic. Probably not one among them dreamed of the swift development of the country traversed by their lines of rail, or that those deserts would ever be thickly populated. Even as late as the date of the completion few there were who believed those barren, treeless wastes could ever be made agriculturally profitable. But the tide of population, seeking cheaper land on which to build homes, surged resistlessly westward. They were pushed from the fertile valleys onto the barren Plain, and, by the help of nature, conquered the wilderness. The very climate changed before the mystery of this advance of civilization. The iron rails, which soon spread in every direction, the upturning of the prairie sod, the planting of trees, worked a miracle of regeneration. Especially was this notable in the rain-fall. Observers have testified that, with the beginning of civilization, the rain-belt steadily advanced westward from the Missouri at the rate of eight miles a year. In the earlier days on the Plains none of the

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main crops could be raised except by irrigation. From April to September no rain fell over a vast region. The snows of the mountains alone furnished the streams with water, and gave the short bunch grass sufficient dampness to sustain its life until July. To those who knew that country then, and can behold it to-day, the difference is marvellous. The truth is, the Great Plains were never a desert, in the proper application of the term. They were a misunderstood region, where fertility only awaited opportunity. That opportunity arrived with the coming of a railroad, and the thousands of hardy settlers who flocked to the promised land.

Dodge sums it all up in these words;

“It is not too much to say that the opening of the Pacific Road, viewed simply in its relation to the spread of population, development of resources, and actual advance of civilization, was an event to be ranked in far-reaching results with the landing of the Pilgrims, or perhaps the voyage of Columbus.”

And Inman adds:

“The Great Salt Lake Trail is now crossed and recrossed by the iron highway of commerce. The wilderness is no longer silent; the spell of its enchantment is broken. The lonely trapper has vanished from the stern mountain scene. The Indian himself has nearly disappeared, and in another generation the wild landmarks of the old trail will be almost the only tangible memorials of the men who led the way.”

## CHAPTER V

### BORDER TOWNS

#### Cow-Towns the Nuclei of Permanent Settlements

**T**HIS pushing forward of railways into the wilds of the Plains caused a rapid advance of settlement where formerly the sustenance of life had been impossible. At the end of the unfinished line, as it progressed westward, there was always a mushroom town built of shacks and tents, among which saloons and brothels were prominent, the streets generally littered with discarded tin cans, and, at night, swarming with a heterogeneous population. Here lived the surveyors, the graders, the track-layers, and the train men, and about them clustered swarms of parasites desirous of living off their wages through the glittering allurements of sin. Some of these temporary halting-places became towns and cities of importance in later years, and one or two held the honor of forming the end of the Long Trail in the closing era of the cattle trade; but more often they passed into absolute oblivion as the road advanced, their very names forgotten.

Yet every eight or ten miles along the gleaming rails there was left the nucleus of settlement, sometimes a mere water-tank, with its attendant section house, planted like a guard in the grim desert; again, some such desolate spot would arrive at the dignity of a cow-town, a shipping place for the

## THE GREAT PLAINS

cattle of neighboring ranges. Under the stimulus of this passing trade the place would flourish and expand, shacks would spread out over the prairie into the semblance of a straggling village; general stores would appear along the main street, usually facing the track, rude, barnlike structures; saloons, gambling-dens, and dance halls would be strewn thickly in between the few legitimate business houses, while cattle pens straggled along the road in evidence of the town's real mission. During the height of the cattle trade, after the moving westward of the Long Trail, these places became centres for a wide extent of trade, and led a wild, riotous, and prosperous life.

### The Cowboys' Idea of Enjoyment

To thousands of cowboys, riding the sun-browned plains of Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Indian Territory, isolated for weary months of incessant toil in the saddle and at the home ranch, such squalid settlements, when finally reached once or twice a year, afforded their sole glimpse of the wider world. Here, to their minds, was life; and, no sooner was their bunch of cattle safely penned for shipment, than they turned themselves loose, seeking all the enjoyment to be found. They were like children attracted by tinsel and tawdry glitter, and all that was offered them was of the lowest. The vices of the border were few and coarse, but these the cowboy off duty was eager enough to sample. He found plenty of teachers ready to as-

## BORDER TOWNS

sist, so long as he parted freely with his coin. Every man stood for himself alone in those days and in that land; he was what he proved himself to be by the rude code of the border. There were no artificial distinctions, no social barriers; it was a world governed by physical force, dominated by passions unrestrained. The West asked no questions of any man; all that had been, in other days, east of the Missouri, was blotted out. Here he stood eye to eye with his fellows, and no voice challenged him.

### Character of the Frontier People

Emerson Hough writes:

"Virtue was almost unknown in the cow-town of the 'front' in the early days. Vice of the flaunting sort was the neighbor of every man. The church might be tolerated; the saloon and dance-hall were regarded as necessities. Never in the wildest days of the wildest mining camps has there been a more dissolute or more desperate class of population than that which at times hung upon the edge of the cattle trail or of the catle range and batted upon its earnings. The chapters of the tale of riotous crime which might be told would fill many books, and would make vivid reading enough, though hardly of a sort to the purpose here. . . . It is strange that the records of those days are the ones that should be chosen by the public to be held as the measure of the American cowboy. Those days were brief, and they are long since gone. The American cowboy has atoned for them by a quarter of a century of faithful labor, and it is time the atonement were written for him in the minds of the people by the side of the record of his sins."

### Picturesqueness of the Cow-Towns

These little cow-towns, while they lasted, were full of color, excitement, and picturesqueness.

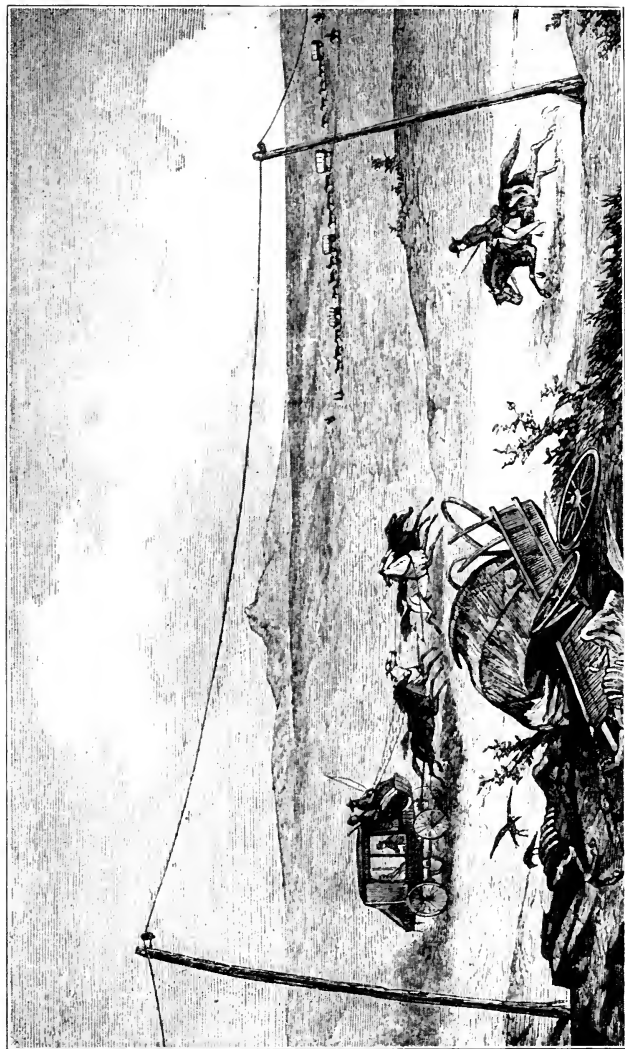


## THE GREAT PLAINS

Never again can their like be seen. The environment was dull, desolate, forlorn; all that was worthy of the eye, the thought, was the pulsing human element. All about was the barrenness of great Plains, stretching unrelieved to the horizon, while here in the middle of the grim picture clustered the rude, unpainted houses, the shacks, the grimy tents flapping in the never ceasing wind, the ugly red station, the rough cow-pens filled with lowing cattle, the huge, ungainly stores, with false fronts decorated by amateur wielders of the paint-brush, and the more ornate dens of vice. The pendulum of life was ever swinging here: if the day was dull, the night made up for it in clamor; if a week passed listlessly, the next was crowded full with riot and spending. It all hung on the coming and going of those reckless riders of the range. When the dust rose high above the trail, the sleeping parasites awoke in eager anticipation, and set their traps for the victims riding in so gaily to their fate.

### Mixed Society of the Cow-Towns

How the vivid memory of it all comes back, intensified rather than faded by the years. Society was mixed, no man cared who his neighbor was, no man ventured to question. Of women worthy of the name there were few,—the station-keeper's wife, perhaps, with one or two others,—yet the night saw flitting female forms in plenty, and the lights of the saloons displayed powdered cheeks and painted eyebrows. It was a strange, restless,



TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE PLAINS

THE TELEGRAPH, THE OVERLAND STAGE, THE EMIGRANT TRAIN, AND THE PONY EXPRESS RIDER



## BORDER TOWNS

commingled population enough—cowboys, half-breeds, desperadoes, gamblers, saloon-keepers, merchants (generally Jewish), petty officials, and drunkards by profession. The town was an eddy which caught odd bits of driftwood, such as only the frontier ever knew. Queer characters were everywhere, wrecks of dissipation, derelicts of the East, seeking nothing save oblivion. Life was cheap in the midst of such chaos, and all the dignity of the law vested itself in the town marshal or the sheriff. He ruled not through any terror of courts behind him, but by sheer force of personality, and an acknowledged ability to “drop” his man. The position was no sinecure, and he who held it successfully needed to be a man of nerve. Early and often was he put to the test, and any failure to “make good” was his official death-knell. Those who “won out” through such trials of endurance were, with hardly an exception, of the same stripe—cool, quiet, courageous fellows, just, patient, and fair in their treatment of offenders, but quick as a steel trap, and as unyielding in fight as a bulldog.

The first requisite for any man who would prosper in a cow-town was undoubtedly “sand.” Any one permitting himself to be “run over,” was from that moment an object of contempt, and sooner or later every new arrival was put to the test, and labelled accordingly. If he “made good,” his future career in that community was a much easier road to travel. Every border town in those days was certain to contain its bully, or “bad man.” He was

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generally a surly desperado, possibly a coward at heart, but malicious and quarrelsome when in liquor. Not infrequently two, or more, of this interesting class partnered together in search for trouble. Their special game was "tenderfeet," or new arrivals, for the old hands were not so easily dealt with. Yet the man who minded his own business, and kept his mouth shut, was seldom interfered with. The majority of the gun-fights so prevalent in those days, occurred between men who were hunting for trouble, and only occasionally was there a killing in which the victim was any loss to the community.

### The Druggist and the Cow-Puncher

A stranger soon learned that every man who sported a "gun," and swaggered about with profane oaths on his lips, was not necessarily courageous, and the first feeling of awe often changed to one of contempt. The average "bad man" always sought an advantage; "quick on the draw," unscrupulous, generally provoking the quarrel, he took few chances of injury. Yet it was not always easy to distinguish the true from the false. In a cow-town every citizen sported his gun, and there was only one recognized method of settling a difficulty. The individual must defend his own rights, and the man who won respect was the fellow who demonstrated himself as being "square," who was never out hunting trouble, but who always met it promptly when it came. Anecdotes of those strenuous

## BORDER TOWNS

days are numerous; the pages of writers upon Western history and romance teem with them, and facile pens have thus made commonplace bar-room roughs into frontier heroes.

### The Larger Cattle-Towns

The larger cattle-towns, those chosen from time to time during its western migration as a terminus for the Long Trail, were merely greater and more cosmopolitan representatives of this same life. While the small cow-town attracted the reckless riders of the neighboring ranges, the more extensive one drew to itself from out the wide distance the entire floating population of the border. Here met the cattle-men of the West and their legions of riders, the long drive ended, and their pockets bulging with money they were eager to spend. From Nebraska and Texas, the Territory, and even New Mexico and Colorado, they came in, driving before them vast herds of dusty, tired cattle, and already intoxicated with dreams of joys awaiting them. And the joys were there, the dispensers ready for the carnival. From dawn to dawn the tireless search after pleasure continued. The bagnios and dance halls were ablaze; the bar-rooms crowded with hilarious or quarrelsome humanity; the gaming-tables alive with excitement. Men swaggered along the streets looking for trouble, and finding it; cowboys rode into open saloon doors, and drank in the saddle; troops frenzied with liquor spurred recklessly along the streets firing into the

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air, or into the crowd, as their whim led them; bands played popular airs on balconies, and "barkers" added their honeyed invitations to the din. It was a saturnalia of vice, a babel of sound, a glimpse of inferno. Every man was his own law, and the gun the arbiter of destiny. The town marshal, or the sheriff, with a few cool-headed deputies, moved here and there amid the chaos, patient, tireless, undaunted, seeking merely to exercise some slight restraint. Never again can such sights be beheld; even now there may be those who will doubt the truth of the picture.

### Their Riotousness

Yet town after town passed through this experience, before the Long Trail finally disappeared from history. Abilene, Newton, Wichita, Ellsworth, Great Bend, and Dodge, each in turn, welcomed and entertained the riotous crew. Out of the mystery of the Great Plains they came, ripe for mischief, in search after excitement, and the thousands of providers flocked to give them greeting. Those were the great days of the range, days when money was as water, and the cowman reigned as king; no wonder the towns that entertained him were lively, and everything "went" at the end of the drive. He paid for his fun; let him shoot out the saloon lights, and demolish the bar—double the value would be given when he sobered up and remembered. When men would order a hundred dollars' worth of ham and eggs, or bathe in champagne, the

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ordinary methods of the effete East were not to be considered. The cattle country had its own standard, as it had its own vices. The men who made it were a race unto themselves, and those of another generation are not fitted to judge them. They were good and bad; nobility was no stranger along the border, and a friend there was a friend to death. Good manhood was always assured of respect, and true womanhood revered. Ours the failure if out of the chaos, the brutality of this primitive society, we fail to discern the real character of those who dominated it.

### Hough's Pen-Picture of the Cow-Town

I like to dwell on Hough's appreciative picture of his last glimpse of the typical cow-town:

"It is high and glaring noon in the little town, but it still sleeps. In their cabins some of the men have not yet thrown off their blankets. Along the one long, straggling street there are few persons moving, and those not hastily. Far out on the plain is a trail of dust winding along, where a big ranch wagon is coming in. Upon the opposite side of the town a second and more rapid trail tells where a buckboard is coming, drawn by a pair of trotting ponies. At the end of the street, just coming up from the *arroyo*, is the figure of a horseman — a tall, slim young man — who sits straight up on his trotting pony, his gloved hand held high and daintily, his bright kerchief just lopping up and down a bit at his neck as he sits the jogging horse, his big hat pushed back a little over his forehead. All these low buildings, not one of them above a single story, are the color of the earth. They hold to the earth therefore as though they belonged there. This rider is also in his garb the color of the earth, and he fits into this scene with perfect right. He also belongs there, this strong, erect, and self-sufficient figure. The environment has produced its man."



## CHAPTER VI

### OUTLAWS AND DESPERADOES

#### Varieties of the Desperado

**T**HE wide extent of the Plains, the free untrammelled life, and lack of law-enforcement, led inevitably to the development of the outlaw. The typical "bad man" of the cattle-towns was not necessarily in this class, although his kind was very frequently represented. The men of note on the border, who took up robbery as a trade, were seldom brawlers, and almost never swaggered through the streets posing as desperadoes. They were of a far more dangerous species, with whom action spoke louder than words. In the "good old times" there was a class of men along the frontier sufficiently large to be seriously reckoned with; these were fugitives from justice, and escaped criminals. They preferred living on the extreme border, were always suspicious of strangers, and generally ready enough to be recruited for any crime, under competent leadership. Such leadership was seldom lacking.

The desperado was always in evidence in the cow-towns. Often he was only a blustering, whisky-soaked coward; but some of his class were natural fighters, and became savages in their desire for notoriety and slaughter. Usually choosing "tenderfeet" as being easy victims, they sometimes sought after harder game. Such a border ruffian

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has been known to travel hundreds of miles for the purpose of having a fight with another whose fame as a dead shot rivalled his own. At one time a deputy United States marshal of southern Kansas, a wonderful two-handed shooter (that is, one who could use a revolver equally well with either hand), was ordered to arrest a notorious bully. In the fusillade which naturally resulted both were shot through the body. Some hours later the dying desperado asked how the marshal was, and being told he could not live until morning, expressed himself as satisfied. "I'm willing to die," he said, "when I can take along with me the best pistol-shot on this frontier." The marshal recovered.

### Julesburg a Notorious Haunt of Desperadoes

Through all the years of its earlier existence Julesburg was celebrated for its desperate characters. Twenty-four hours seldom passed without contributing another silent occupant to Boots Hill, the famous cemetery where every sleeper was laid away with his boots on. Homicide was performed in the most genial manner, shooter and shootee smiling pleasantly into each other's face. Jack Slade, who had charge of that division of the overland stage route, was probably the most successful assassin of them all. Competent authority affirms that he was guilty of having murdered in cold blood over fifty men, sometimes tying them to a stake, as he did Old Jules, and deliberately practising at them with a pistol. Yet when his own time came to pay

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the cost, when he was in the remorseless hands of Montana *vigilantes*, he begged on his knees, crying and whining like a whipped cur.

### Cattle-Stealing

Next to homicide, the most popular crime of the border was probably cattle-stealing. There were, at different times, well organized bands for the robbery of mail-coaches; outlaws, frequently disguised as Indians, openly attacked emigrant trains on the trail; but "rustling" cattle on the Plains apparently had the greatest attraction for the largest number of the reckless and depraved. To a cowboy out of work, or chafing under authority, it was the natural outlet. In some ways, and to an accommodating conscience, it scarcely seemed a crime to pick up an unmarked calf, or a stray cow wandering along in some sequestered *coulée*, and apply a branding iron in claim of ownership. This step once taken, the next naturally followed, and a deft touch of the hot iron easily changed one brand into another. The "IO" brand became "IOI," or even "ЯOB"; the " )—( " mark was transformed into "O—O"; or the "V" was altered into "◇." It was all extremely simple, the tools necessary were very few, and the changes infinite. At the end of a season, with the final spring round-up, the enterprising "rustler" had a nice bunch of cattle to his credit on the range, and, whatever suspicion might be afloat, there was no direct evidence forthcoming.

All this was plain sailing at the start, and many a great fortune in the cattle business was begun in

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just this way. Nor were those early "rustlers" very much ashamed of their trade. If they stole, it was from men who, strictly speaking, possessed little property except what they had likewise stolen, and held by force of arms. The great companies prospered on free grass and free water, which they seized and guarded. But the time came when these large owners combined for the purpose of crushing out the little fellows. This was done with the intention of stopping rustling, but it increased it a thousand fold. Opposition stirred up the spirit of open rebellion in the cow-puncher; to him it was an invasion of rights to be promptly resented.

### Cattle Thieves become the Majority

From a very small industry cattle-stealing became a recognized trade, the few scattered rustlers of the earlier years consolidating into organized bands, with assistants everywhere. More than once they met the riders of the big ranges in open battle, and again there was war on the Great Plains. Hough writes:

"The rustler was a cow-puncher, and one of the best. He understood the wild trade of the range to its last detail. Among cow-punchers there were men naturally dishonest, and these turned to illegal rustling as matter of course. They were joined by the loose men of the upper country, who 'were not there for their health,' and who found the possibilities of the cattle system very gratifying. These took in with them, sometimes almost perforce and against their will, often at least against their convictions, some cow-punchers who were naturally as honest and loyal men as ever lived. To understand their actions one must endeavor to comprehend clearly what was really the

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moral code of that time and that country. This code was utterly different from that of the old communities. Under it the man who branded a few calves for himself as an act of 'getting even' with the unjust rules of the large cow outfits and the big Eastern syndicates was not lowered in the least in the esteem of his fellow-men, but, to the contrary, was regarded as a man of spirit, and therefore entitled to the rough Western respect which had no eye for him who submitted to be 'imposed upon.' "

### The Vigilantes

To this class, struggling for what they deemed their rights, there drifted naturally all sorts of hard and dissolute characters from out the chaotic population. All that were lawless along the frontier discovered there an opportunity for crime, and embraced it with ardor. The more recklessly desperate rose to leadership, and soon attracted a following easily turned toward unrestrained outlawry. Murder and open robbery were committed; stock was run off in droves, regardless of brand; horses changed owners in a night; and no man having property was safe from attack. Such a state of affairs could not last. The *vigilantes* came to life, for there were no courts to deal with such a condition. The work was thoroughly accomplished. In the first campaign between sixty and eighty rustlers were put under the sod. On one morning a single railroad bridge had thirteen corpses swinging from it. The struggle for supremacy turned northward; it extended through years far beyond the limits of our story, and did not end until the reign of the rustler was done. "In the ten years from 1876 to 1886 the

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*vigilantes* of the cattle country," according to Hough, "executed as many men in Nebraska, Dakota, and Montana as have been legally executed by the law in any dozen States in all the time since then."

### General Lawlessness on the Plains

Throughout the entire history of the Plains the bullying desperado of the town, and the crime-stained outlaw of the open, were made unduly conspicuous. From the times when the half-breed Charles Bent and his band of "dog soldiers" harassed the Santa Fe Trail, until those later days when Sheriff Pat Garrett killed "Billy the Kid" at Fort Sumner, New Mexico, and the Dalton boys ran up against the rifles at Coffeetown, Kansas, the border beheld scenes of lawless, fiendish atrocity which have caused the many to forget that it was really peopled and won by law-abiding men. To enter into detail would result merely in a sickening record of robbed and wrecked stages, of burned caravans, of emigrants left utterly destitute in the wilderness, of mutilated dead bodies beside the trail, of savage, revengeful gun-fighting in bar-rooms or midnight streets, and the mention of names utterly without merit and better forgotten. Such brawls were but incidents of wild life, and the gathering together of such a heterogeneous society. Yet their record was a record of terror scarcely conceivable. "Billy the Kid," a mere boy of twenty-two when he fell, had killed in cold blood more than one man for each year of his miserable life. Others

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there were well worthy to rank beside him in infamy. Not a cow-town, or a border settlement from the Rio Grande to the Missouri but contained its "bad men," its stories of desperate encounters, its graveyards where the short-lived heroes rested in their boots. Some had turned to open outlawry, and their hideous careers were ended by the rope of the *vigilantes* or the rifles of some sheriff's posse; others died before the quick fire of cool-eyed city marshals, or by the lead of opponents in their own class. Let them lie and moulder into forgetfulness—"Bad Eye" Connelly, "Pistol" Hicks, Jim McCabe, "Three-fingered Pete," and all the rest of the riotous, blaspheming murderers. Dust they were, to dust they have returned, and to each in turn there came the moment and the man. The wages of sin is death.

### The Sheriffs and Marshals

But there were other gun-fighters in those days: men enlisted on the side of right and order; men who met these boasting desperadoes on their own chosen ground and whipped them to a standstill; cool-eyed, resourceful, nervy men, making no bluster, but shooting straight—the sheriffs and marshals of the West. Among these were to be found scoundrels and cowards, who were outlaws in disguise and sympathizers with criminals, but not many. Night after night, day after day, in the mad riot of the cow-towns, where every man was a walking arsenal; or out on the wide Plains amid the loneliness and silence, these selected representatives of

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law and order upheld their authority by their own strength of character, and their quickness on the trigger. They were the law, and their sole authority was the ready "gun" swinging on the hip. Angels were not chosen for such a post; in some cases they had stepped forth from the very ranks of the vicious, but they generally "made good," and proved worthy of the trust imposed.

### William Hickock, a Typical Upholder of the Law

The names of such men are many,—not a few of them died in discharge of their duty,—but the most famous along the border was William Hickock (Wild Bill), who for years ruled the destiny of several of the hardest of the Kansas towns. The story of his life on the Plains, while more remarkable in some respects than that of others of his class, yet is sufficiently typical to bring before the reader a vivid pen-picture of the deeds and the men who then upheld law along the border. William Hickock was born in Illinois, but ran away from home when little more than a boy, and found his way out to the Plains. For fifteen years he lived among the trappers and hunters, sharing in their wild, free life; later he became teamster and scout; and when the Civil War broke out he promptly enlisted in the Union army. As a soldier he was almost constantly detailed as scout, and saw hard service both with the army of the Frontier, and the forces operating along the Mississippi. During this period his adventures between the lines, and hairbreadth escapes from



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death, verged upon the marvellous, and he won the commendation of his superiors. At the close of the war Bill drifted again to the frontier, his nature craving the excitement of that kind of life. Here he accepted such work as came his way, but proved himself specially useful as a Government scout. Fame came to him, however, while officiating as marshal in such cow-towns as Abilene, Hays City, and Dodge. Cool, quiet in manner, never quarrelsome or under the influence of liquor, absolutely without fear, and a dead shot, he never failed to arrest or else to kill his man, and his name became a terror to the desperadoes of the entire border. How many fell before his unerring aim is not known, but he fought fair, and he stood for law and order. He was a necessity of his time and environment.

### His Physique and Prowess

In his prime Wild Bill was a magnificent specimen of a man—a warm-hearted, loyal friend, but a persistent, tireless enemy. He stood six feet and an inch in his moccasins, perfectly proportioned, graceful and quick in movement, with remarkable depth and breadth of chest. His eyes were dark gray, their expression generally soft and pleasing but capable of hardening; his lips were thin and sensitive, the jaw not too square, the cheek bones slightly prominent. He wore his dark hair long, flowing to the shoulders. The border never produced a finer pistol-shooter, he being equally quick and accurate with either hand, firing apparently without aim, his

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movements like lightning. But he shot to kill. For years he walked in the shadow of death, facing again and again the most dangerous men of the border, with hundreds eager to kill him on sight, ruling the hardest towns the world ever knew by his nerve and his quickness on the trigger. His two most famous affairs were his duel with Dave Tutt, and his single-handed fight with a desperado named M'Kandlas and nine of his gang.

### His Two Most Famous Fights

The first affair occurred at Webb City, Missouri. Tutt, a discharged Confederate soldier and "bad man," deliberately picked a quarrel with Hickock on account of an old score. Bill tried to stave off trouble, but Tutt's friends kept daring him to fight, and finally the two men met in the public square. Both drew and fired at the same instant, but Bill, without waiting to see the result of his shot, wheeled, and, with smoking revolver covered Tutt's friends. Tutt fell, the bullet lodging in his brain.

The fight with M'Kandlas was one of the most desperate encounters in the annals of the border. It occurred in southern Nebraska, near the Kansas line, Bill being attacked by the ten armed men in a settler's cabin. The lone man killed five of them with gun and pistol before they succeeded in breaking in and getting hands upon him. Then it was fists and knives. His own description runs:

"Two of them fired their bird guns at me, and then I felt

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a sting run all over me. The room was full of smoke. Two got in close to me, their eyes glaring out of the clouds. One I knocked down with my fist. The second I shot dead. The other three clutched me, and crowded me onto the bed. I fought hard. I broke with my hand one man's arm. He had his fingers round my throat. Before I could get to my feet I was struck across the breast with the stock of a rifle, and I felt the blood rushing out of my nose and mouth. Then I got ugly, and remember that I got hold of a knife, and then it was all cloudy like, and I was wild, and I struck savage blows, following the devils up from one side to the other of the room and into the corners, striking and slashing until I knew that every one was dead. All of a sudden it seemed as if my heart was on fire. I was bleeding everywhere. I rushed out to the well and drank from the bucket, and then tumbled down in a faint."

He had eleven buckshot in him, and was cut in thirteen places, but had wiped out the M'Kandlas gang. It was years later, and far up in the Black Hills, that Wild Bill was treacherously shot to death, the ball being fired into the back of his head as he sat at a card table.

## CHAPTER VII

### FRONTIER SCOUTS AND GUIDES

#### Some Famous Scouts

**T**HE West owes much to those hardy men who, usually from mere love of adventure, wandered alone or in small companies across the wilderness, ever in advance of the settlements and the troops, exploring the unknown, tracing nameless rivers, uncovering hidden water holes in the grim desert, penetrating to every nook and corner of the Great Plains and the mountains beyond, discovering the haunts of Indians, the routes which the wheels of caravans could follow with greatest safety, the best camping spots, the scattered places where wood and water were certain to be found. To such as these—the scouts and guides of the frontier—every prairie traveller, every incoming settler, every officer riding at the head of his troop and seeking the savage foe owed gratitude.

The names of many of these men became renowned upon the Plains, and deserve remembrance by this generation. Such were Uncle John Smith, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, James P. Beckwourth, Uncle Dick Wooton, Jim Baker, Lucian B. Maxwell, Old Bill Williams, Tom Tobin, and James Hobbs, among the old-timers; and W. F. Cody, Wm. Hickock, California Joe, Dick Cherry, and Amos Chapman, of a later generation. By daring,

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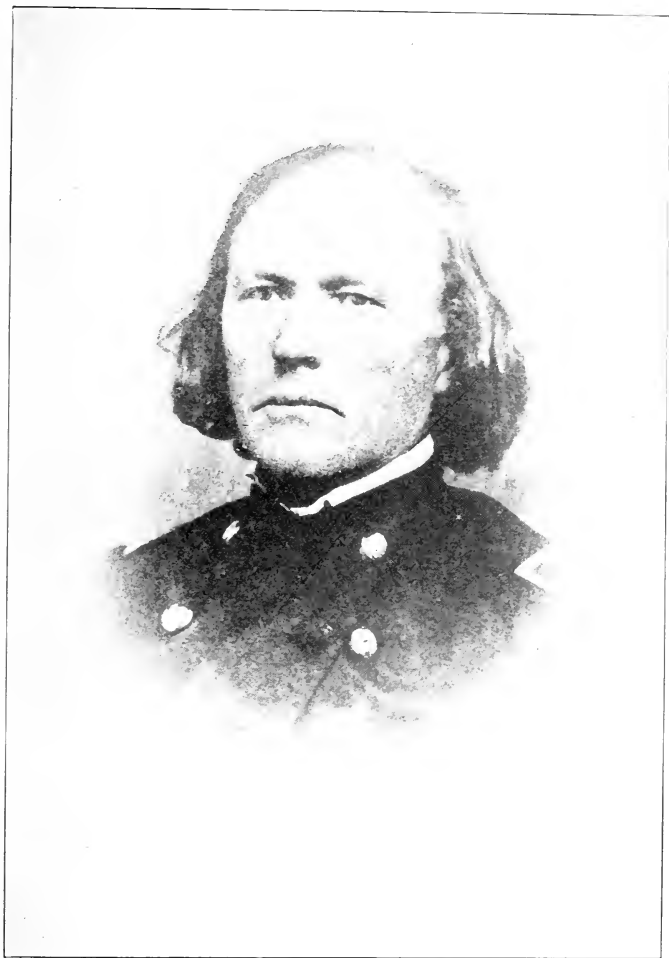
endurance, resourcefulness, and constant devotion to duty these men have won fame that will endure in the history of the Plains. Tireless as the Indian, knowing their traits, characteristics, habits; reading the secrets of the Plains like an open book, careless of personal danger, and inured to loneliness, they remained on the skirmish line of civilization, and of many of them the fate is unknown.

### A Few Whose Fame will Endure

The scouts of the frontier were numerous, yet in actual service only a few proved really valuable. Those who rose out of the ruck did so through sheer ability, and have been honored in the reports of the army officers they guided in arduous campaigns of war or exploration. They became famous throughout the length and breadth of the frontier. It was the reports of Frémont that lifted Kit Carson from obscurity; Custer made the fame of California Joe; Merritt and Carr gave wide spread to the reputations of Wild Bill and Buffalo Bill. The names of these few Plains celebrities now belong to the history of their country.

### John Smith

There were few plainsmen who did not know one or all of these great pathfinders, and deem the knowledge worthy of a boast. Uncle John Smith ranged from the Yellowstone to the Gila, and from the upper Missouri to the Rio Grande; not an Indian tribe but had held him guest, scarcely a stream



*W. Carson*

THE FAMOUS SCOUT, TRAPPER, AND PLAINSMAN



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along whose waters he had not trapped. In 1826, when a mere boy, he ran away from home and joined a party of Santa Fe traders, and ever afterwards the wilderness held him captive. He married a Cheyenne squaw, spoke four Indian dialects, besides French and Spanish, and ruled like an autocrat the Indian trade of the Western Plains. As late as 1869, when he was an old man, he was one of Sheridan's most trusted guides, competent, tireless, unerring as a bloodhound on the trail. His life had been one constant adventure; and when in congenial company he would recount for hours the stirring events of his career. His facial resemblance to President Andrew Johnson was remarkable, and led to some amusing incidents.

### Kit Carson

Kit Carson was on the Plains and in the mountains for forty-two years, and his name will always stand forth preëminent among famous frontiersmen. In turn a trader, a hunter, a free trapper, a scout for the army, a guide to explorers and to travelling caravans, and finally a Colonel of Volunteer Cavalry, he had a wider experience than any of his contemporaries. His was a life of hairbreadth escapes, of endless adventure, marvellous activity and usefulness. For eight years he was the hunter at Bent's Fort, and all the Plains Indians, as well as the Utes of the mountains, knew him well, and feared and respected him. Many a time did he avert war by his influence in the lodges; but when it



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came, no man ever met it more promptly. As a sign-talker he had few if any superiors, and as a trailer he very seldom lost track of those pursued. Inman, who knew him well, thus sums up his characteristics:

“Carson’s nature was made up of some very noble attributes. He was brave but not reckless; a veritable exponent of Christian altruism, and as true to his friends as the needle to the pole. Under the average stature, and rather delicate-looking in his physical proportions, he was, nevertheless, a quick, wiry man, with nerves of steel, and possessing an indomitable will. He was full of caution, but showed a coolness in the moment of supreme danger that was good to witness.”

While he was visiting at Fort Lyon, Colorado, in 1868, an artery in his neck was ruptured, causing his death. Thus passed away the most famous frontiersman of the Great Plains. His burial place was at Taos, New Mexico, where he had long made his home.

### Jim Bridger

Jim Bridger began his experience on the Plains with Ashley’s great trapping expedition. During his years of frontier life he became the peer of the best among mountaineers and plainsmen. Uneducated by the schools, ignorant of all social conventionalities, he yet possessed a heart overflowing with the milk of human kindness, was generous, honest, and loyal to his friends. His most important services were rendered as scout and guide during the early surveys for the first transcontinental railroad, and for a number of years he was in Government employ guiding army detachments in Indian cam-

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paings. No man of his time knew the northern Plains, or the mountains beyond so thoroughly as he, and it was his eyes that first looked out upon Great Salt Lake the Winter of 1824-25. Bridger, after a life of wild adventure, transcending fiction, died and was buried at Westport, Missouri.

The resemblance of John Smith to President Andrew Johnson has been mentioned above. Inman relates that once, when the President in his "swing around the circle" had arrived at St. Louis and was riding through the streets of that city in an open barouche, he was pointed out to Bridger, who happened to be in the city. But the venerable guide and scout, with supreme disgust depicted on his countenance at the idea of any one attempting to deceive him, only exclaimed: "Hell! Bill, you can't fool me! That 's Old John Smith." On another occasion, discovered by a friend sitting on a dry-goods box in one of St. Louis's narrow streets, the old frontiersman thus relieved his feelings: "I've been settin' in this infernal canyon ever sence mornin', waitin' fer some one to come along an' invite me to take a drink. Hundreds o' fellers has passed both ways, but none of 'em has opened his head. I never seen sich a onsociable crowd."

Bridger acted as guide for Sir George Gore on his famous hunting trip in 1855-57, during which the party killed over forty grizzly bears, twenty-five hundred buffalo, and an unknown quantity of smaller game. Gore had with him fifty helpers, including secretaries, steward, cooks, fly-

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makers, dog-tenders, and personal servants. His was one of the strangest outfits ever seen on the Plains. During their trip the baronet gave Bridger a copy of the adventures of Baron Munchausen to read. After painfully deciphering the text the frontiersman confessed that he'd be "dog'oned ef he swallowed everything that thar Baron Munchausen said," and thought he was a "darned liar"; yet he acknowledged that some of his own adventures would be equally marvellous "if writ down in a book."

### Jim Baker

Jim Baker ranked well up with these others as plainsman and mountaineer. Next to Carson he was Frémont's most valued scout. An Illinoisan, he was eighteen years old before he appeared on the Plains as an employee of the American Fur Company. So far as known, he was never again east of the Missouri. Having married a Snake Indian, and passed much of his life in the company of savages, he imbibed many of their superstitions and habits. When off duty he drank heavily, and wasted the money won by his successful trapping. Bent's Fort on the Arkansas became his chosen outfitting point, but for months at a time he would disappear in the wilderness. So successful was he in snaring wild game that in a single season he sold nine thousand dollars' worth of fur. The stories told of his prowess in fight are numberless, and his friend General Marcy, of the United States Army, made the old

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fellow famous in the pages of his books on border life.

### Jim Beckwourth and Others

Jim Beckwourth was one of the odd characters of the wild West. He was a mulatto of medium height but great muscular power, and no man in mountains or on Plains ever led a more adventurous life. He was hunter, trapper, trader, scout, and Indian-fighter, and, being a born leader of men, he became head-chief of a great tribe of savages, the Crows. Historians have seen him from vastly different viewpoints. Parkman wrote: "He is a ruffian of the worst class; bloody and treacherous, without honor or honesty; such, at least, is the character he bears on the Great Plains. Yet in his case the standard rules of character fail; for though he will stab a man in his slumber, he will also do the most desperate and daring acts." This statement is not upheld by those who knew him intimately — Carson, Maxwell, and the Bents. To them he appeared the most honest of all Indian traders, and a man to be trusted in any emergency. He first went to the mountains with Ashley in 1825. It is true that his fame largely rests on his published biography, some of it no doubt true, but much going to prove him a "charming liar."

Uncle Dick Wooton passed his life on the Plains in the neighborhood of the Santa Fe Trail, along which he first passed at nineteen as teamster in a trading caravan. He became noted as an Indian-

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fighter, and from his intimate knowledge of the entire Southwest. Bent's Fort was his rendezvous for several years, where he was a great favorite, not only because of his prowess in the field, but because of his fund of anecdote about the camp-fire. His earliest encounter with Indians occurred at the crossing of Pawnee Fork, and later he had another severe fight on the same spot. In 1866 Wooton built a log house in the Raton Pass, and remained there until his death, collecting toll from those travellers who used the road he had made across the mountains. Frequently he was obliged to extract pay at the muzzle of his rifle, but very few ever got by him scot-free. He died at the age of ninety, and many of his adventures have found record in the pages of Inman.

Old Bill Williams, the guide who led Frémont astray on his last expedition, was a unique character. He had been a Methodist preacher in the East, but was on the Plains long before Kit Carson left the Missouri. No man knew the mountains better, unless it was Jim Bridger. A man of education, he easily mastered the different languages of the tribes, but to both Indians and Mexicans he remained an unsolvable riddle and a terror. As a trader he was a total failure, and many of his companions considered him partially insane, although a brave, warm-hearted, and generous man. He was finally killed by Indians.

James Hobbs had a remarkable career during his long life on the frontier. He was for years a



JAMES P. BECKWOURTH

AN EARLY CALIFORNIAN FAMOUS AS TRAPPER AND SCOUT



1909

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prisoner among the Indians, a soldier in the war with Mexico, an officer in the revolt against Maximilian, an Indian-fighter, miner, trapper, trader, and Government scout.

Tom Tobin was the last of these famous trappers and hunters of the old regime to pass away. He was a quick-tempered Irishman, under the average stature and red-faced, always ready for fight or frolic. He was present at most of the famous Indian battles of the early explorers; but his greatest achievement was killing the notorious Mexican bandit Espinosa in a desperate hand-to-hand conflict in 1864.

### William F. Cody and Amos Chapman

William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) and Amos Chapman were the best-known bordermen of later days, and were worthy to rank with those mentioned above. Cody began his career on the Plains as a mere boy on a caravan trip to Santa Fe, became teamster on a "bull" train, driver on the Overland, and Pony Express rider before he was of age. As early as 1863 he was employed as guide and scout for an expedition against the Kiowas and Comanches, and later carried despatches straight through the hostile Indian country between Forts Lyon and Larned. A great many of his adventures, including his desperate duel with Yellow Hand, a Cheyenne chief, have been told in the books in which he collaborated with Colonel Inman. His famous appellation was won during employment as



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a hunter for the Kansas Pacific Construction Company in 1867-68. In less than eighteen months he killed nearly five thousand buffalo, which were eaten by the twelve hundred workmen employed in track-laying.

Amos Chapman was fifteen years in Government employ as scout on the Plains. During this life of constant peril and exposure one of his most heroic acts occurred while he was bearing despatches for General Miles from his camp on McClellan Creek to Camp Supply, I. T. The despatch party consisted of six men. Early in the morning, after a hard night's ride, they were suddenly attacked near the Washita River by a band of over a hundred Kiowa and Comanche warriors. Colonel Dodge thus describes what followed:

"The first intimation of the presence of Indians was a volley which wounded every man of the party. In an instant the Indians appeared on all sides. Dismounting and abandoning their horses, the brave band moved together for a hundred yards to a buffalo wallow, a shallow natural depression in the prairie. Chapman and Dixon, being but slightly wounded, worked hard and fast to deepen this depression, and as soon as it was sufficiently deep to afford some cover it was occupied and the work continued from within. Smith had fallen from his horse at the first fire and was supposed to be dead. . . .

"Chapman said, 'Now, boys, keep those infernal redskins off me, and I will run down and pick up Smith, and bring him back before they can get at me.' Laying down his rifle, he sprang out of the buffalo wallow, ran with all speed to Smith, seized and attempted to shoulder him. . . . 'I laid down,' said Chapman, 'and got his chest across my back, and his arms around my neck and then got up with him. It was as much as I could do to stagger under him, for he could n't help himself a bit. By the

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time I had got twenty or thirty yards, about fifteen Indians came for me at full speed of their ponies.' ”

The boys in the buffalo wallow opened on the Indians and Amos ran for it.

“ ‘When I was in about twenty yards of the wallow,’ he continued, ‘a little old scoundrel that I had fed fifty times rode almost on to me and fired. I fell with Smith on top of me, but as I did n’t feel pain, I thought I had stepped in a hole. The Indians could n’t stay around there a minute, the boys kept it red-hot, so I jumped up, picked up Smith, and got safe in the wallow. ‘Amos,’ said Dixon, ‘you are badly hurt.’ ‘No, I am not,’ said I. ‘Why, look at your leg,’ and sure enough, the leg was shot off just above the ankle-joint, and I had been walking on the bone dragging the foot behind me, and in the excitement I never knew it, nor have I ever had any pain in my leg to this day.’ ”

## CHAPTER VIII

### MUSHROOM TOWNS

#### General Description

**A**N INTERESTING phenomenon of Plains settlement, perhaps without parallel elsewhere, were those strange towns which sprang up in a night wherever the advancing railway paused, and which passed away as suddenly with the further extension of the rails, leaving scarcely a trace behind. The peculiarity of the conditions under which these earliest overland roads were constructed made such mushroom towns inevitable, and the nature of their population served to render them sufficiently picturesque. Stretching boldly forth into an uninhabited and barren waste, to which every pound of material required and every man employed had to be transported, the end of the track, both on the Union Pacific and the Kansas Pacific, became of necessity a great temporary distributing point, full of unceasing activity and a feverish, throbbing life. Money was plentiful, and no restraints of home kept the restless inhabitants within bounds. Gamblers, saloon-keepers, and dissolute women eagerly flocked to each temporary terminus, certain of reaping a quick harvest. Shacks and tents, rude structures of board, or even sod, sprang up like magic on the bare prairie, and scarcely had the decree gone forth that here the railroad would

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pause for awhile, ere the spot teemed with humanity, and a new "city" appeared in the twinkling of an eye. Few of such cities survived; scarcely half a dozen of them yet remain. They all flourished a month, some of them six, revelling in sin and lawlessness, only to pass away utterly from the face of the earth.

Historians have never considered this chapter of frontier life worthy their pens, yet it deserves picturing as illustrative of how civilization first penetrated the wilds. A writer in Harper's Magazine, who had been connected with the building of the Kansas Pacific, embodied his remembrance of those days in an article from which I extract much material.

### Coyote

Ours the task to rescue from oblivion towns which were, but are not. Coyote was such a town, the temporary terminus of the railroad in 1868. Nothing could be more dreary than its environment. On every side the monotonous rolling Plains meeting the cloudless sky. The town itself was a crazy street of shanties; its inhabitants a mob of uncouth men flung down among the buffaloes. Where they originally came from was a problem, but the majority had drifted into Coyote from some other mushroom town a hundred miles to the east. They brought with them their dwellings, their stores, the few necessities of life. The new home was made in a day, and was old in a night. Canvas saloons, sheet-iron hotels, sod dwellings, discarded

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tin cans, and scattered playing-cards littered the ground. The cards were apparently numberless and always in evidence. Says the writer in Harper's Magazine:

"Before the breath of the north wind they would rise into air, the queens dancing like so many witches in effigy, as close over the smooth surface they fled south. A few moments, and the barren earth would be swept clean, while the pasteboards, accompanied by stray newspapers and old hats, were fluttering, like a flight of white birds, out of sight. Three days, the usual life of a full-grown prairie gale, might pass, and then, as the north wind met the forces of the south, the tenantless air became alive again. Far off on the heel of the vanquished and the crest of the victor wind, came the white-winged coveys of cards, like the curses of the proverb, on their way home to roost. At nightfall they had collected beside the track and among the houses, and were again as thick as leaves in autumn. Had it been possible for conscience to prick through a Coyote gambler's skin, how it might have gratified him to see the marked Jack that had fleeced the last stranger rise up like a grasshopper and fly south, beyond the possibility of becoming State's evidence! And how annoying to wake up, and find the knave again under his window!"

Coyote lived its brief eventful life in the midst of the buffalo country. For a hundred miles in any direction carcasses disfigured the land. The meat, cut into strips or lying on sleds, "jerked" and merchantable, was everywhere. It could be had almost for a song. Occasionally a wild herd, stampeded by careless hunters, would dash directly through the town, bowling over tents in their terror, and creating pandemonium among the surprised occupants. To many of the citizens such an occurrence was only second in interest to a dog-fight, and-bets were

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quite in form. The sporting proclivities of the place were especially aroused on one occasion when a veteran buffalo bull tried in vain to fish out a frightened citizen from behind a log, where he had hurriedly taken refuge after a poor shot at the beast. Try as he would, the infuriated animal could only succeed in ripping the fellow's pants into rags, but with every thrust there came a yell which would have done credit to an Apache. Instead of interfering in the fun the manhood of Coyote placed bets on the result, cheering in turn for the bull or Sandy, with strict impartiality.

### Sheridan

Coyote had a brief but merry life. The terminus moved forward to Sheridan. The change was easily accomplished. In less than a week not a shack remained, only thousands of oyster and fruit cans marking the deserted spot. Sheridan, where the terminus remained longer, became a larger Coyote. It was named after the famous General, then stationed at Fort Hays not far distant, and when that hero was finally introduced to his lusty namesake, he is said to have remarked that, as a seat of war, it strongly resembled the Shenandoah Valley, while the yelling and firing of the Irish mob of employees on pay-day reminded him of Stonewall Jackson's ragged battalions. Sheridan graced the side of a desolate ravine, with the yet more desolate Plains on every side. It was built complete in a month, but before the single street had even been surveyed the

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necessity arose for a graveyard, and one was promptly located on a ridge overlooking the town. When any angry citizen threatened to give another a "high lot" he meant six feet of soil on that hillside. During the first week three moved in "with their boots on," and during the winter the list was swelled to twenty-six.

### Odd Characters

Odd characters were attracted to such a community as this, as flies to a sugar barrel. The correspondent of Harper's Magazine thus pictures two who deserve to be embalmed in history:

"There was 'Neb, the devil's own.' Neb was an abbreviation of Nebuchadnezzar, which title he won from taking so naturally to grass, or, more correctly, to the prairie, when it was necessary to hide on account of misdeeds. Had any one been interested enough to make weekly inquiries about Neb's whereabouts, the answer would generally have been, 'Out 'at grass.' On two occasions he assisted men to eternity without previously using a boot-jack. Once, when an Irish mob was celebrating pay-day, Neb ran out of a hotel opposite, and emptied sixteen shots from a Henry rifle among them. No one was killed, but the 'devil's own' found it necessary to go into exile on the back of a stray mule, followed for hundreds of yards by a howling mob and shower of bullets."

Neb ended his glorious career finally at the hands of *vigilantes*.

Another individual of prominence in Sheridan was "Ascension Stephen." According to our reporter,—

"This worthy was a half-witted Millerite, who climbed the two buttes once or twice every month, with a saloon tablecloth

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in his pocket that might answer for wrapper when the great trumpet should sound. Fine evenings were often spent by him in this weary and lonely waiting, and on one occasion he frightened the wits out of some drunken Irishmen by rushing down the hill toward them as they were returning from a wild debauch. So well did the tablecloth do duty on this occasion that, for the first time in months, the Irishmen reached their homes sober. A more effective temperance banner never fluttered in the breeze."

### Lynching

Judge Lynch was well known in Sheridan, and the railroad trestle was a most convenient gallows tree. It was sure to bear monthly, and sometimes daily fruit. On more than one occasion passengers on the cars have drawn back in affright as they beheld staring up at them the face of some Texas Jack, or California Joe who had perished in his sins. Not that Sheridan was, either outwardly or inwardly, moral or law-abiding, but it was generally recognized that there was a limit not to be passed without physical protest. As a rule morals were rather looked upon as articles of commerce. No one endeavored to possess any, unless money was to be made in that way. If any citizen abjured cards, women, and wine, he was pretty certain to have some other game under way which would cost his confiding fellows heavily. But it would be well for him to be far out on the prairie before his victims awoke to the result. Vengeance was quick and sure, and vigilance juries brought in some queer verdicts in Judge Lynch's Sheridan court. The chronicler gives one instance where a man, arrested on suspicion, but without evidence enough against



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him to convict, was indiscreet enough to call the court names. He promptly incurred the following unique sentence: "This yere court feels herself insulted without due cause, and orders the prisoner strung up for *contempt*." And strung up he was.

### Sham "Bad Men"

The town fairly blossomed with "bad men," and the crop of "Bill" heroes was without apparent end. To be named by doting parents William was to assure any ambitious frontiersman future fame: he became Wild Bill, Apache Bill, or some other Bill by some magic in the atmosphere, a terror to tenderfeet, and generally a blasphemous, swaggering bully and coward. Our friend in Harper's Magazine thus pictures one such he knew in Sheridan. He was a teamster, named William Hobbs.

"He could not have placed a bullet from his carbine in a barn door at a hundred paces. And yet, without any provocation whatever, he seized upon the word California and wore it, although that wonderful State had never, to my certain knowledge, been favored by his presence. This man had not been cut out for a hero. His becoming one was in direct violation of nature's laws. He was fat, short of wind, red-faced and timid as a hare. As the frontiersman expressed it, having never lost any Indians he could not be induced by any consideration to find one. However, by lying in wait for tourists and correspondents, he often managed to get business as a guide. He had donned a suit of buckskins made in St. Louis, and would state to the gaping stranger, 'My name 's California Bill yere; over thar it 's 'Pache, on account o' my fightin' the tribe.' He could not have told one of the latter from a Digger, yet soon the Eastern papers came back with thrilling descriptions of this noted scout and Indian-slayer. But I have known this dead

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shot, to miss, four times in succession, a bison at fifty yards; and one occasion, having mistaken a Mexican herder for an Indian he fled so fast and far that he lost hat and pistol, and ruined his horse."

### Real "Bad Men"

But do not let this incline you to believe there were not real "bad men" in Sheridan. The genuine article was there, and woe to the tenderfoot who thought otherwise. Both Cody and Hickock, the real Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, walked those streets, cool, quiet fellows enough, but not the kind of men to play with, unless you wanted to die. And there was another kind as well, the typical frontier desperado, always in liquor and always quarrelsome. Tragedy was in the air, yet it scarcely affected the orderly citizen who was content to attend strictly to his own business. The roughs usually fought it out among themselves. Writes this observer justly:

"In all my residence upon the frontier, during which time sixty-two graves were filled by violence, in no case was the murder otherwise than a benefit to society. The dangerous class killed within its own circle, but never courted justice by shedding better blood. Orderly people looked on with something like satisfaction, as at wolves rending each other. The snarl was the click of a revolver, and the bite followed the bark. These were the men who gloried in snuffing out a candle, or a life, at thirty paces."

An illustration occurred in the ending of two notorious bullies of Sheridan, known locally as Gunshot Frank and Sour Bill. From some cause unknown these worthies quarrelled, and decided to fight it out in spectacular fashion, to the delight of

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the crowd. Each armed himself with a revolver, shouldered a spade, and started off for the ridge. The plan was for each man to dig a grave for the other, then exchange places, and see which would have to be filled. However, before the work was half done, "Gunshot" made an impudent remark, and Bill promptly plugged him through the abdomen. Balked of a good part of their anticipated enjoyment, the crowd fell upon "Sour," and one of them caved in his head with a spade. That night two men slept in the graves dug by their own hands.

### The Hotel at Sheridan

Oh, those were great towns, gone forever from the face of the earth, yet lingering in memory! Who, that ever sought sleep in Sheridan's one hotel, could ever forget the experiment? Hastily constructed, so as to be moved at a moment's notice, every creak of a bed echoed from wall to wall. The partitions failed to reach the ceilings by a foot or two, and the slightest sound aroused the whole floor. A pistol shot in No. 47 was quite likely to disturb the peaceful slumbers of the occupant of No. 15, and every "damn" in the thronged bar-room below caused the lodger to curl up in expectation of a stray bullet coming toward him through the floor. Under the window a mob howled, and a man in some distant apartment was struggling vainly to draw off his tight boot, skipping about on one foot amid much profanity. That the boot conquered was evident when the fellow crawled into the creaking bed. "If

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the landlord wants them boots off, let him come an' pull 'em." You could lie there and hear everything that occurred. Every creak and stamp and snore was faithfully reported. Inside was hell; outside was Sheridan.

But it has all passed away; it was a part of the life that was, but is no more forever. The "Bills" have gone the way of all flesh, and so has Sheridan. The train pauses an instant even now at the station bearing the name, but there is nothing visible except the solitary house of the railroad section hands. The hotel, the saloons, the shacks have all disappeared, and about stretch the dull, dead Plains. Only up there on the hill, still in their boots, lie those whom the migrating Sheridan left behind in memory of those days that were.

## CHAPTER IX

IN 1870

### Changes Effected by the Railways

**B**Y THE end of the sixties the Great Plains presented a new aspect. Over a large part of that vast area civilization had already come, and the war henceforth was to be with the forces of nature instead of unrestrained savagery. The lines of railway in operation the full length of Kansas and Nebraska, bringing in new settlers, and making possible a swift consolidation of troops, had completely changed the aspect of the Indian country. Hostile alliance of the fighting tribes was no longer possible, and one by one they were induced to go upon their reservations under guard. Indian war was not ended entirely, and trouble occurred with these wards of the nation for many years. The fierce fighting at Robinson, on the Rosebud, at Slim Buttes, and Wounded Knee were yet in the future, and the world was yet to shudder over the awful tragedy when the men of the Seventh Cavalry went down to death on the Little Big Horn. Yet the end was already in sight—tribal outbreaks might occur, but never again was a great Indian war possible. Men of the white race had won to themselves the Great Plains; their feet were securely planted on

the prairies, and there was no turning back the oncoming tide.

From battle against savage enemies the settlers turned now to conquering the pitiless forces of nature which sought to bar their progress. Foot by foot they won their way; by the plough and by tree-planting steadily pushing westward the reluctant rain-belt; utilizing the streams in projects of irrigation, and through the wondrous magic of labor, converting the barren desolation into countless farms and productive ranches. Villages sprang up along the lines of steel, and upon the banks of neglected water-courses; new names appeared upon the maps, and hardy settlers, eager for cheap land and glad of the opportunity for independent labor, spread out farther and farther amid the bluffs until they even dared their fortunes on the open prairie. It was the birthtime of States, of great commonwealths, rich in manhood and womanhood, soon to be rich in all those material things which intelligent labor wrests from Mother Earth.

#### The Advance of Kansas and Nebraska

The tale of one section is the tale of all, except that emigrants naturally poured in more rapidly under the stimulus of railroads already constructed. Kansas and Nebraska advanced by leaps and bounds. In spite of droughts, the plague of grasshoppers, the occasional Indian raids along the exposed borders, there was no marked cessation of the tide of immigration. Settlers became discouraged,

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burned out, eaten out, driven out, but others as instantly took the vacant places, and ever the skirmish line advanced. The Platte and the Arkansas became lined with cities and towns, farms and prosperous settlements. The Solomon, the Vermilions, the Republican, the Big and Little Blue, the Elkhorn, and the Niobrara, no longer flowed through desolate prairie, the haunts of wild beasts and primitive men, but watered tilled farms, and gave back increase to the husbandman.

### Dakota and Colorado

In far Dakota the progress was slower, yet no less distinct. Settlements fringed the streams, and eager miners flocked to the unveiling mystery of the Black Hills. Little by little even the great fighting nation of the Sioux were compelled to yield up their chosen land to the resistless white invaders. The doom of the Indian was already plainly writ, the new chapter of development well under way. In Colorado the tide was beginning to sweep back from the golden mountains out upon the bordering Plains. The character of the population was changing, and the steady plodding farmer was rising to an importance equal to that of the prospector and the delver after minerals. Life everywhere from river to mountain had assumed a new aspect; the old feverish border days had gone. Courts and law had become paramount; Judge Lynch and the *vigilantes* were superseded; sweet-faced women smiled from the doorways, and little children played about

the doorsteps. Civilization had laid its hand of power on all the hitherto wild scene, and contentment and prosperity were coming to the prairies. It was a wonderful story, that of the marvellous years between 1865 and 1875; a story of growth, of hardship, of suffering manhood and womanhood; and it ended in a victory never to be forgotten, never to be lightly thought of. It is not easy to conquer a wilderness; it is not accomplished by gloved hands and sweatless brow. It means days and nights of toil, sacrifice, privation, suffering, and peril. It means isolation and loneliness, hours of despair, and the gazing often into the stony eyes of defeat before natural obstacles yield to man's indomitable will. Here man is on the firing line, and must hold it at all cost. The right men were there; from the upper Missouri to the Rio Grande they moved steadily forward, a thin but dauntless line, their ragged clothes as much a badge of honor as the red-coats that held the French horsemen at Waterloo, while, mile by mile, they transformed the barren desert into a garden of fertility, and won the world an empire.

#### Disappearance of the Cattle Ranges and the Indian Trails

It was not all done then; it is not all done even now. For many a year the wide expanse of the Plains proper, lying between the utmost western advance of Kansas and Nebraska, and the backward sweep of the Colorado settlements, remained a waste. This high and almost level plateau defied



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the farmer by its lack of sufficient rain-fall, and the seeming impossibility of irrigation. Only through long experiments of science did it begin to yield to the demands of men. Here the cattle ranged in vast herds, guarded by the remnant of that great army of cowboys who had once, and so short a time before, ruled the whole West as their own land. Already their glory had departed, and they were beholding the last glimpse of "free water and free grass." Here, also, were the Indian trails, no longer worn deep through the prairie sod, but growing ever more dim and indistinct. Now and then some tribe would break its bounds, and follow the old trail in a sudden mad foray; there would be burning cabins along the uttermost frontier, a breaking of the thin white line, a cowboy dead and scalped in some lonely *coulée*, a short trail of destruction. But it was soon over with. A swift gathering of troops, a rally of settlers, a sharp fight, and the helpless red men were guarded back to the reservation from whence they came.

The tide took new strength and rolled on, obliterating the old trails of savage feet, effacing the great ruts worn by the wheels of the speeding overland or the slow-moving caravans, ploughing up the buffalo wallows, leaving us to guess where the express riders spurred their reeking ponies, or gallant troopers rode forward to their death. The end was inevitable, and by 1870 it could already be perceived. From then on it was but a question of time—and how short a time! Much that was pic-

turesque, bizarre, and romantic vanished, but only to make room for the more important and lasting. "Home!" was the watchword of the new invading force, as, spreading out over rolling prairie and level Plain, fertile valley and arid desert, the toilers of the crowded East came pouring in to take possession of their own. Peace hath its victories no less renowned than those of war.

### Conquest of the Great American Desert

It was a long, toilsome, and perilous journey from that far off time when Cabeça de Vaca made his solitary pilgrimage amid the "hump-backed oxen," to the time of the invasion by Anglo-Saxon civilization. For three hundred and forty-three years those vast grim Plains had been the scenes of struggle; the sun of midday and the stars of midnight had watched the slow transformation. The marching of troops under three banners; the desperate battles amid the dreary buttes; the slow, sullen retreat of savagery; the stern advance of silent, persistent frontiersmen; the slow-rolling caravans piercing the wilderness; the daring riders spurring their horses across the wide Plain; the victim sobbing in torture; the lost traveller praying in famine; the white, dead faces upturned to the pitiless sky—all that had been and gone. And then, out of the East they came to take possession; over the long miles, across the rivers and the prairies, came the conquering Anglo-Saxons—men, women, children—armed with the plough and the spade,

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animated by the dogged resolution which is the inheritance of their race, thrilling to the thought of home, and to the passion for possession. The hour and the man had come; the Great American Desert was a thing of the past. *Le Roi est mort: vive le Roi!*

THE END.





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